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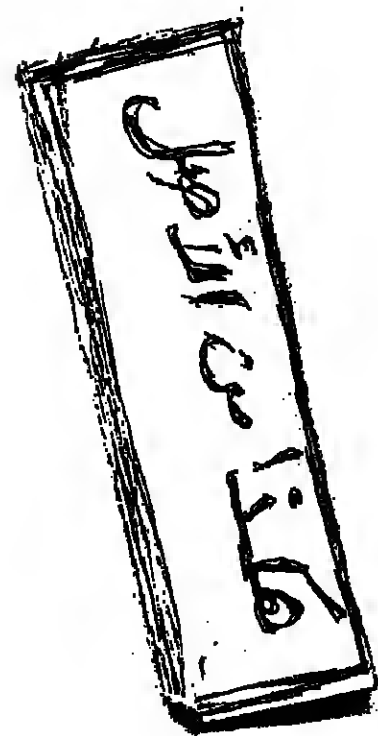
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Cover picture
One of a series of black and white photographs—'Victories and Defeats'—by the Lithuanian photographer Romualdas Poshvins. It is reproduced from *Another Russia: through the eyes of the new Soviet photographers* by Danila Mitkovsky and Vladimir Reines (176pp, Thames and Hudson, £12.95, 0-500-54116-0).

Jumping the Q

Richard Jenkins

CHRISTOPHER RICKS (Editor)
The New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse
654pp. Oxford University Press. £15.95.
0192141546

This is a splendid anthology. Far superior to Quiller-Couch's original *Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* of 1912 (though that in itself is not high praise), it combines authority with just the right spice of idiosyncrasy. Christopher Ricks starts from a wise combination of two principles: first, lay down for yourself firm rules; second, break them sometimes. For the most part he keeps to poems written in Queen Victoria's reign, well arguing that otherwise the anthology is likely to begin with his own presuppositions about the character of Victorian verse and choose those poems which fit his idea. Q was lax in this regard: his poets include such unlikely Victorians as Joyce and Pound, both represented, needless to say, by very uncharacteristic work. Professor Ricks's main, and sensible, exception is some early poems of Tennyson, written before 1837 but not published until later. He aims to print poems in their entirety or not at all; an exception is made for *Aurora Leigh*, but otherwise only for "units to which the poet gave a distinct autonomy"; this allows him to include, for example, sections from *In Memoriam* and *The City of Dreadful Night*. He has chosen entire poems much longer than are customarily found in anthologies, including what he calls "four substantial masterpieces". You can win money off your literary friends by betting them that they cannot guess which these are. The answers: Lewis Carroll's *Hunting of the Snark*, FitzGerald's *Rubáiyat*, Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* and Clough's *Amours de Voyage*; the last of these runs for thirty-four pages. An eccentric decision is to order the authors by the date at which the first of their poems selected was written: Newman follows Hopkins; Tennyson comes second in the entire collection, his elder brother second last.

Who's in, who's out?—the question is inevitable. While Q selected more than 250 poets, Ricks chooses 119, a severe cull. It is the more striking, therefore, that over a quarter of his poets were not in Q at all, and some—Eliza Keary, William Rontgen, Louisa J. Guggenberger—are resurrected from a deep obscurity. Some of the Victorians' own favourites vanish entirely: Arnold and Morris are out—Sir Edwin, that is, and Sir Lewis. Ricks's own views cannot always be surmised; he warns us himself that the amount of space given to each poet is not a sure guide. Still, it is clear that Matthew Arnold has suffered diminution. There is demotion for Cory (no "Heraclitus", no "Mimnermus in Church") and William Morris, promotion for John Gray. The bull market continues in Baines, Clare, Emily Brontë and Christina Rossetti. Hopkins has dropped back slightly from a historic high. Dowson is still in the doldrums, and Francis Thompson stays in the doghouse.

In the tradition of *The Golden Treasury*, Q's anthology is a collection of lyric pieces. Satire, narrative poetry and light verse are effectively excluded. By contrast, Ricks prints a great quantity of light verse; indeed three of the "four substantial masterpieces" arguably fall into this category. The inclusion of light verse sometimes restores the shape of Victorian literary history. Taka Hood's "Miss Kilmansegga", Jagger's *In Great Expectations* keeps moving his hands as though washing them; but Dickens was anticipated by Hood, whose Sir Jacob "in the fulness of joy and hope / Seem'd washing his hands with invisible soap, / In imperceptible water". So, more surprisingly, was Matthew Arnold. Here is Arnold: "Wring / ... Has anyone reflected what a touch of grossness in our face ... is shown by the natural growth among us of such hideous oases, Higginbottom, Stiggins, Bugg! In Iola and Allica they were luckier ... And here is Hood, twenty years earlier: "A name?—if the party had a voice, / What mortal would be a Bugg by choice, / As a Hogg, a Grubb, or a Chubb rejoice, / Or any such neuseous blazon?" It is pleasant to think of *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time* drawing upon the old punster.

guessed at; he prefers nonsense and satire to simple comedy and cheerful humour. He keeps out W. S. Gilbert altogether; Belloc's best comic verse was written after Victoria's death, but we might have had something from *The Bad Child's Book of Beasts*. We are allowed J. K. Stephen, but only in acid mood, not jolly or sentimental. Lear and Carroll are generously treated.

The problem with nonsense verse is that the boundary between imagination and silliness is so narrow. Lear had a high talent for absurdity, but it seems that he never blotted a line, so that the result is often hit-and-miss. He could be twee, as with the pobble, who "tinkledly-binkledly-winkled a bell" across the Bristol Channel, and he could be merely sloppy: "How pleasant to know Mr Lear" is one of his best pieces (Dame Helen Gardner put it into *The New Oxford Book of English Verse*), but "that crazy old Englishman, oh!" (rhyming with "so") is a line less than lapidary. Ricks selects four of his limericks and prints them complete with Lear's illustrations (which is right); but what an odd choice he has made. "There was

thought he saw an elephant / That practised on a fiddle". In *The Snark*, when Carroll seeks to be silly, he is—well, silly merely; the poem works when we feel it to be a dream-parody of books encountered in waking life, a mixture perhaps of *Moby-Dick*, Sir Richard Burton and Lear's "Story of the Four Little Children Who Went Round the World".

Q's poets have strong institutional loyalties. In Newbolt's "He Fell Among Thieves" a young Englishman awaits execution by Afghan bandits. What does his mind dwell on through his last night of life? Athletics at school and dinner in college hall, with "The Dons on the dais serene". Cory's Sicilian reveries and Lefroy's adoring sonnets about handsome young cricketers, for all their classical tropings, are essentially about the English public school. Q spares us Swinburne's rhapsody on Eton (too long, no doubt), but we get the ode by Bridges on that school, Lionel Johnson on Winchester and Newbolt in Clifton Chapel. We have Andrew Lang on St Andrews and Oxford; and on Oxford slane, Arnold, Johnson again and Q himself. The last poem in the



"Ladies reading in an interior" by Abel Orry, 1872; to be offered in their sale of Imporum 19th Century Pictures at Christie's Great Rooms on June 26.

an old man who screamed out / Whenever they knocked him about; / So they took off his boots, And fed him with fruits, / And continued to knock him about." Surely this is, as Johnson said of pastoral poetry, "easy and therefore disgusting"; and it is accompanied by a crude and feeble drawing. But here (not in Ricks) is nonsense with a shape to it: "There was an Old Man who said 'Hush! / I perceive a young bird in this bush! / When they said—'Is it small?' He replied—'Not at all! / It is four times as big as the bush!'" And this time the picture is integrated with the text, being funny in the same way that the verse is funny: a birdlike man stares at a man-sized bird; their almost circular shapes echoing the little round bush on which the bird is perched.

Carroll is quite different: he was an intellectual. It is no accident that some of his best-loved absurdities are built upon parody; his nonsense is held firm by fibres of donnish wit. His unique genius was to put the whole of himself, including a high logical intelligence, into books for children, without condescension. The philosophers who enjoy the White King's category mistakes and Humpty Dumpty's relativist theory of language are enjoying the same things that ease and delight their small sons and daughters, whereas *The Wind in the Willows* (say) affords the child and the grown-up different pleasures. The dream world of Wonderland reaches down to the part of the unconscious where there is no division between infancy and maturity, whereas the work of Maurice Sendak a post-Freudian knowledge discovers the adult from the child. Yet Carroll seems in his later career to have misunderstood his own genius, and, I think, to have misled Ricks. He tried to write Lear's kind of nonsense, but the products seem condescending. Ricks does not include "The White Knight's Song", which Helen Gardner—I think rightly—printed; but he does find space for the nonsense rhymes from *Sylvie and Bruno* ("He

collection is Abercrombie's "Ceremonial Ode intended for a University", which explains how these institutions teach man to trade with Eternity and inhabit the purpose of the stars, a view distinct from that of the Green Paper on Higher Education. It is not only the conventional who are in thrall to these adolescent memories; the aesthetes and the bad boys are equally or even more entranced. One imagines the English decadent, after a hard day's abstinence and flagellation, sitting down gratefully to an evening with the school mag. And thus Q, by the very dimness of his choices, has given us an insight into English culture, for one of the keys to understanding it is to recognize the effect of their schooling upon unexpected people. Any upstanding English lad would have kicked Walter Pater, you might suppose; yet his memories of King's School Canterbury were so fond that he was to interpret Sparta, of all places, as a public school idyll. A vital clue to George Orwell's character is his furtive love for his Eton days, while Cyril Connolly's *Enemies of Promise* is now manifest as a displacement fantasy, attributing to the former gods of the sports-field the obsession with past schoolboy triumphs that haunted himself.

Ricks sweeps away these school and varsity effusions. (However, he is very good to his old college: Balliol men occupy almost a hundred pages, or more than 140 if honorary fellow Browning is counted.) He is tough on the schoolmasters: Cory is reduced to a single, untypical poem about the new woman at Cambridge, which hides his keener interest in the traditional boy at Eton. Yet Ricks's values seem to be those that a Victorian pedagogue would approve. No blubbing, no morbid thoughts, no unhealthy yearnings for the good-looking boys—the voice of a schoolmaster rallies the ranks. The fusher, more languorous forms of lyricism do not win his favour: Dowson's "Cynara" is out; and only two lyrics

from Tennyson's *Princess* survive; Ricks excludes "The Lotus-Eaters" but includes Mortimer Collins's satire upon it. Weedy self-pity is stamped upon: Ricks prints Mallock's savage attack on Arnold's low-spirited agnosticism, but not the poems in which that agnosticism is best expressed. Homosexuality is barely perceptible, except in Housman. Hopkins is not allowed to praise male beauty: he loses "Felix Randal", which Helen Gardner printed. The decadents get friendly treatment, but they are kept on their best behaviour. And Ricks is right: when we consider how far homoeroticism suffused late Victorian literature, it is striking how little good verse it produced. Ricks welcomes sentiment, but he likes it to be expressed with tautness and restraint. Any collection of German verse is full of spare, luminous lyrics: Goethe, Heine, Mörike. Ricks's book is more like a German anthology than we might have expected: it reveals a tradition of uncluttered, tender austerity. Hardy now seems a less lonely fluric, an essentially Victorian poet. Edith Nesbit (the *Railway Children*) is a good example of Ricks's discoveries. "Oh, baby, baby, baby dear" may not seem a promising start to a poem (she has reincarnated as a lyricist for the *Swinging Blue Jeans*), but her gentle songs of blighted love have a twist of asperity threaded through them. One suspects that Browning is Ricks's *beau idéal* of a Victorian poet, ranging from the stripped poignancy of "Confessions" to the sardonic unguarities of "Caliban upon Setebos". Q's pages are thick with classical allusions, Dunsen, Apollo, Hermetianus and the rest. These are much sparser in Ricks, and the most conspicuous exceptions are half-exceptions. He gives us two poems by Browning about learning Greek, "A Groomman's Funeral" and "Development", but these are really about the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, not the ancient world. "Now lies the Earth all Daned to the stars"—Tennyson's line suggests not so much antiquity as the paintings of the Italian Renaissance. His "Ulysses" owes more to Dante than Homer; "Tithonus" derives scarcely more from Greek myth than its starting-point, the idea of immortal life without immortal youth. Ricks gives generous space to a Professor of Greek and a Professor of Latin (Hopkins and Housman); but though *The Wreck of the Deutschland* bears a vague general resemblance to Pindar's Fourth Pythian Ode, neither man drew much upon the classics for his poetry. There is a parallel to be found with the Victorians' visual world. Anyone writing a book on Victorian architecture will dwell upon the big works of the Gothic Revival and on those buildings which look forward to modernism, but the common currency of Victorian building, as a trip to pub or theatre or a walk round the streets of London quickly shows, was a debased classicism. So it is with verse: Grecian names are sloshed over the jerry-built structures of Victorian postscript like succo in South Kensington.

There will be black crape out in Never Never Land: Ricks does not believe in fairies. Plenty of Victorians did: a whimsical treatment of the supernatural—fays, founs, satyrs and the great god Pan—runs as a thin but persistent thread through Victorian literature, and becomes a dissonance between about 1890 and the First World War. There is much of it in Q; in Ricks only Allingham's "The Fairies" ("Up the airy mountain") survives the slaughter. Sometimes the fairies get caught up in the English love-affair with Ireland, as in Allingham's poem or Buchan's "The Faery Reaper". Q's book is laden with Irish names and places, Eileen Aron and Dark Rosaleen, Shandon, Neilan and Clonmacnois; even when we have excluded the well-known Irish writers, Joyce, Synge, Stephens and A. E., we still find in pages a dozen or more poets crooning over the Emerald Isle. It is less hospitable to Scottish Highlanders wallowing about glens and heather, while Ricks drives them out with a thoroughness that a Duke of Sutherland might envy. He deos almost as brutally with the Irish Question, the young Yeats of course being an exception: Mangon survives with two poems only, neither on an Irish theme, and Katharine Tynan with one. In unkind counterpoise we have some of the greatest poems of the nineteenth century, Hopkins's *Dark Sonnet*, inspired by the misery of living in Dublin,

Ricks's is indeed a very English anthology. His poets are rooted in their own time and place, robustly sustained by their native soil. They care as little for the Continent as for the Celtic fringe: only in John Gray do we catch a whiff of Verlaine and Mallarmé. But we should not regard Yeats, in his new context, as an Irishman stranded among the English. For he is at first sight an exception of another kind: usually it is the English who yearn after Celtic twilight and raven-haired colleens in the mist, while the true Irish, with gloomy relish, depict a land sudden in rain, booze and guilt. Yeats is no counter-example, and not just for the reason that, like most Irish writers, he was English by race. Patriotic Irishmen and pixilated Englishmen have combined to obscure the fact that from his first self-conscious hours his boyhood home was in Bedford Park: Sligo was the far, enchanted land where you went for long holidays with your grandparents. Yeats's curly verse makes sense once we see in it the *Weihnachtslied* of Aetion: maybe it's because he was a Londoner that he loved Ireland so. O has him in context, with "Maureen" and "Aghadoe" by another resident of Bedford Park, the Anglo-Irish doctor, John Tynan. This person also wrote Hellenic verse drama; his *Helena in Troas*, brilliantly produced by E. W. Godwin, moved the young Yeats to transports of enthusiasm which were to embarrass him in later life.

Whereas Ricks gives Hardy a context, with Hopkins the effect is almost the opposite. In Q he merges into his surroundings. The only poem of his printed is "The Starlight Night": "O look at all the fire-flicks sitting in the air! . . . The dim woods quick with diamond welts; the elf-eyes!" For a moment we seem close to conventional fairy nature-whimsy. In Ricks, surrounded by worthier company, Hopkins emerges the more strikingly distinct. This is surely the truer picture: the better we know him, the further does he seem from his contemporaries. Despite his contortions and complexities, he is in one sense more direct, more simply open than other Victorian poets; reading his works one sees plain a man unaffectedly filled with the love of God. At the same time there are more ideas and argument in him than in the others: though a great nature poet and a great devotional poet, he fuses his rapturous celebration of God and his world with a Platonic theory derived from the medieval schoolmen and modified by his own post-Romantic sensibility.

No other poet, either in Q or in Ricks, has such a philosophical bent. Mrs Guggenberger, as it happens, tries to think deep thoughts about Being; unfortunately her thoughts are guff. Housman spoke belatedly for much of the Victorian age when he said that the peculiar function of poetry was not to transmit thought but to transmute emotion. That is hardly as much as a half-truth: the very greatest poetry is marked by intellectual power. The approach to poetry implicit in Q's choices and explicit in Housman easily led to complex people trying to be simple, and clever ones pretending to be brainless. Ricks makes us see the keen edge of

the better Victorians, the acuity of their social perceptions; still, chewing upon the lyrics that he has so well selected, one not seldom tastes the taste of a Snark, "meagre and hollow, but crisp". It is curious and revealing that Christianity is not more prominent in his anthology: his clerics, Barnes and Gray for instance, are mostly not devotional writers; Hopkins and Christina Rossetti are his only religious poets of substance. And he has surely judged aright: the young men of the Oxford Movement (pre-Victorian, of course, in its earliest phase) produced reams of verse, but none of the first order; poetry failed to give adequate expression to the theological storms that shook the age.

The Empire figures little in Ricks. The obvious exception is Kipling; but again one asks, how much of an exception? There are two numbers approaches to the Kipling problem. The first is to claim that it does not matter 'usually it is the English who yearn after Celtic twilight and raven-haired colleens in the mist. . . . Yeats is no counter-example. . . . from his first self-conscious hours his boyhood home was in Bedford Park. . . . maybe it's because he was a Londoner that he loved Ireland so'

what the man says if he says it effectively. This was Auden's attitude in his elegy for Yeats: "Time that with this strange excuse / Pardoned Kipling for his views / And will pardon Paul Claudel / Pardons him for writing well." The other approach (which may seem to work for some of the verse but founders on the prose) is to deny that Kipling was such a brute after all: look at his sympathy for the lowly Indian and the common soldier, his satire on corruption in high places, and so on. Ricks's selection might seem to encourage this second approach. He prints four "imperial" poems, two of them about the army: "Gentlemen-Rankers" describes moral squalor and social degradation, "Danny Deever" a sordid murder and a public execution. "The Story of Uniah" deals with adultery and murder-in-all-but-name in India; that leaves only "Recessional" as a full-hearted hymn of empire. It is perhaps tempting to see this poem too, with its apocalyptic vision of empire's fall, its warnings against frantic boast and foolish war, as an attack upon conventional imperialism: tempting, but probably wrong, for a sense of menace, a whiff of fear-of Germany, Russia, America - is at the heart of the imperial mood. And how critical of army and empire are those other poems after all? If we knew nothing of their author, would we take them for the products of progressive indignation? Not quite, I think: they disclose a relish for the brutalities of life that removes them far from Bloomsbury and the Fabian summer school. One can compare the jingoism of Newbolt's praise of an Imperial God "Who built the world of strife, /

Who gave His children Pain for friend, / And death for surest hope of life". Still, the most full-throated cry of patriotic fervour in Ricks's anthology comes from, of all people, Hopkins, in the last stanza of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* with its rhapsodic prayer for "rare-dear Britain" and "English souls". It is one more example of his capaciousness: there is simply more in him than in anyone else.

Q's preface is of a piece with the verses that he prints, not surprisingly, since he was himself a Victorian poet - in his own estimation at least, for he chooses three of his own works for his collection. He is elegant, vague, soft-centred; and he addresses himself to a cultivated general public. Ricks is much cleverer and sharper, spiky, joky (there are some dreadful puns); his style is clumsier, and he writes for his fellow dons. He speaks of how "misprision" is used as a term of academic criticism; he enjoys discussing what Yeats said about what Vernein said about Tennyson, what Eliot said about Tennyson, what Leavis said about Eliot. One is reminded of that rhyme (Victorian, indeed) about great fleas and little fleas and lesser fleas. Observing, shrewdly enough, that there is smugness in the modernist attack upon the Victorians, he says of one of Yeats's sentences, "Such a revolt against, essentially, complacency has since been seen to be open - like all accusations of complacency including this sentence - to the charge of complacency." This is painfully self-conscious: Ricks and Embarrassment. In his very first paragraph he refers to the reviewers of his volume, a hint of intimidation in his voice.

From one point of view the difference between Q's preface and Ricks's demonstrates the difference between the Victorians and ourselves: between a dilettante culture (in the original sense of that word) and one in which literary taste is guided by a professional salaried intelligentsia, keenly interested in each other's doings. But for all that, Ricks's Victorians tend to be more like himself than they are like Q: acerb, amusing, self-aware. They talk about one another: we have Hopkins on Wordsworth, Browning on Ruskin, Stevenson on Browning, Kingsley on Ruskin and Browning compared. Q's book is full of important names in another way. The list of his poets is rather like "Birthdays today" in *The Times*: some are included for their achievements, others for being nobles. He gives space to a marquess and a marquess's son, three earls, an earl's daughter, a countess, five peers of lower degree and eleven knights. From the peerage Ricks can manage only three barons, and of these two (Macaulay and Tennyson) got to the Lords on merit. Q printed poems by a prime minister, a prime minister's best man, a Viceroy of India, a secretary of state for the colonies, four Oxford Professors of Poetry, and at least seventeen clergy, including a couple of archbishops. Ricks preserves one Professor of Poetry (Arnold, of course) and a few of the clergy (no bishops); the rest - *à la lanterne*. And of course he is right; but Q gives us, not by design, the ordinary pattern of

Victorian culture, for this was an age when statesmen and grandees might spend their leisure with the muse as naturally as business men with their secretaries. Disraeli's sonnet on Wellington gets into Q; his chief, Derby, rendered all 15,000 lines of the *India* into English verse. One has only to try and imagine Mr Tebbit commending himself to his party with a translation of Dante or an elegy on Lord Stockton to see how times have changed. What still remains clear from Ricks's choices is how many prose writers wrote verse as well: Meredith and the Brontës, of course, but also Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Macaulay, Ruskin and Symonds. Ours is a more specialised age: what historian today is also a poet. A. L. Rowse apart?

Though he guilottes the aristocrats, Ricks does not fling his doors open to the workers. When he prints an anonymous satirical ballad on the birth of a Prince of Wales, it seems, like the middle classes at Bello's garden-party, "out of place and mean, And horribly embarrassed". There is no sign of the music-hall, and very little of Victorian hymnody, the rhythms of which have sunk into the British collective psyche. I would guess that the best-known Victorian poems are "Good King Wenceslas" (J. M. Neale) and "All things bright and beautiful" (Mrs Alexander); Neale gets into Q, and so, as it happens, does Mrs Alexander's husband; neither is in Ricks.

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It is good to see Ricks's Victorians looking so strong. However sardonic or disillusioned they appear, they are at heart at home in their age, a self-confident, rising bourgeoisie, hard men who have done well out of the class war. In this volume the energy and diversity of the bourgeois century are too represented, and luckily it is no longer unfashionable to be bourgeois. Perusing Professor Ricks's collection, we can say, as Lady Bracknell said of *The Green Carnation*, but in quite another tone, "It seems a middle-class affair".

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Yet it is surely here that we would have welcomed more rigorous theological analysis, not least as Maurice, and to a lesser extent Westcott, were major nineteenth-century theologians. Did Maurice adequately relate nature and grace? Might not a less self-centred Christian Socialist, and a more perceptive social vision have developed from a Redempt-

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devoted most of a chapter to this topic as part of his aim of showing that even the progressive social ideas and attitudes of the clergy were largely a reflection of class consciousness. Thus F. D. Maurice was, in fact, a Tory paternalist, and Brooke Foss Westcott, founder of the influential Christian Social Union, an socialist at all but a Chamberlain-style Liberal. In *The Victorian Christian Socialists* Dr Norman gives us a more considered, gentle and appreciative appraisal. In his view they were not socialist nor even political by most tests. Nevertheless their social vision has both importance and authenticity: in their social criticism they were true prophets discerning permanent truths about men, in fact the conventional socialist critique of their views highlights their very strength. What they sought was not a collective way of restructuring society but a means of transforming its interior relationships through the recognition of common human elements more fundamental and durable than the accidents of shifting circumstances.

For common humanity

Perry Butler

EDWARD NORMAN
The Victorian Christian Socialists
201pp. Cambridge University Press. £17.50.
0521325153

For Marx, Christian Socialism was but "the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart burnings of the antichrist". Posterity has taken a more balanced view, but has tended, none the less, to see Victorian Christian Socialism as something of an enigma: too suspicious of political action, too clerical, lacking a real grasp of economics, unable to emancipate itself from the odour of condescension. Was it an attempt to Christianize socialism, spread socialism or make socialism more respectable in the Church? What did "Christian Socialism" mean to its exponents in any

From the frontier of writing

Neil Corcoran

SEAMUS HEANEY
The Haw Lantern
51pp. Faber. £7.95 (paperback, £3.95).
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The god Hermes figures centrally in "The Stone Verdict", one of Seamus Heaney's new poems, and there are good reasons for regarding him as the presiding genius of *The Haw Lantern*. Responsible for ensuring the departure of the souls of the dead to the underworld, he shadows the book's various memorial poems, notably the sonnet sequence "Clearances", written in memory of Heaney's mother. His name apparently deriving from the root for "stone" ("God of the stone heap", Heaney calls him), he stands over the book's frequent uses of stone as image, symbol and emblem; its resisting, dangerous obduracy is almost as necessary to *The Haw Lantern* as the yielding, preservative malleability of bog peat which is elegy to experience. Indeed, what seems to me the book's finest poem, "Hailstones", discovers an exact figure for this in its first section when, it risks one of the central buzz-words of deconstruction:

I made a small hard ball
of burning water running from my hand
just as I make this now
out of the melt of the real thing
smarling into its absence.

The word "writing" (or one of its cognates) occurs ten times during the book's thirty-one poems, and there are frequent glimpses of the writer writing. These include, outstandingly, a prayer to his mother in the preface poem to "Clearances" that she might teach him to "strike it rich behind the linear black", as she once taught him how to split a coal block, and a poem in which a poet-analogue, the "stone ginder", tells us how "I prepared my surface to survive what came over it - / cartographers, printmakers, all that liming and inking"; some of these new poems are slyly knowing about their own future as critical palimpsests. This

address to the act of writing makes newly and sophisticatedly salient the familiar vein of self-commentary in Heaney's poetry, and *The Haw Lantern* is, despite a title which oddly conjures up an earlier Heaney mode, a book very much of its literary-critical moment. Opening with a poem called "The Riddle", and closing with one called "The Riddle", it offers a more demanding scrutiny of writerly procedures - of "script" and "story" - than anything in Heaney's career to date.

In "Alphabets" the scripts are the complicatingly various ones of English, Latin and Irish which the young Heaney acquires in the classroom, first of all understanding his alphabets through his experience ("the forked stick that they call a Y"), and then interpreting his experience through script and print ("Bales dmp bales like printouts where stooked sheaves / Made lambdas on the stubble neck at harvest"). This exchange between word and word, experience and text, is uneasy and haunted by loss in *The Haw Lantern*; the poems have a very contemporary sense of how writing is elegy to experience. Indeed, what seems to me the book's finest poem, "Hailstones", discovers an exact figure for this in its first section when, it risks one of the central buzz-words of deconstruction:

to say there, there you had
the finest foretaste of your aftermath -
in that dilution
when the light opened to silence
and a car with wipers going still
laid perfect tracks in the slush.

For what? For forty years

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the finest foretaste of your aftermath -
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The poem defends itself here as the arena in which the healingly interpretative powers of memory can be celebrated, in which apparently discrete experiences can be brought into significant relation by the almost surprised Rikenn delight of "saying there". The present perfection of the poem "Hailstones", which will continue to lay down its trace in time, its own perfect tracks in the slush, supplants and acts its consolation for the "perfect" hailstones of the poem's second section which were "in no time dirty slush".

The Haw Lantern is full of another kind of "saying" too: of saw, fable, instance, riddle and parable. "The Riddle" itself is a punningly titled poem: its "riddle" is at once the wire mesh in which someone in "that story" tried to carry water, and the riddling questions which this poem asks about "that story" ("Was it culpable ignorance, or was it rather / A via negativa through drops and let-downs?") It is a poem, therefore, about how you interpret a "story", and about how interpretation is a morally responsible act. Many poems in the book interpret old stories, particularly those of an entire generation's classrooms: Constantine's miraculous writing in the sky; Diogenes and his lamp; Penelope at her shuttles; Socrates on his death-bed versifying Aeschylus; Wolfe Tone on the sea. There is also an example of that primary interpretative act, translation, in a version of the description of Scyld's "ship of death" in *Beowulf*.

Heaney's own contributions, in a group of "parable" poems, to this tradition of tale-telling supply *The Haw Lantern* with its most interesting stylistic development, and they demonstrate a new kind of poetic intelligence. These poems follow the invitations and promptings not of image but of fable, and they are written mainly in a bare, almost prosaically discursive form. Moralizing the fate of Ireland and the poet's responsibility, but presuppositionally disguising their didacticism in allegory, they inherit some of the procedures of that post-war East European parable poetry which Heaney has recently glancingly discussed in his Eliot memorial lecture on Auden. They are diagnostic, analytic, dispassionate, admonitory, forensic and post-mortem. Nevertheless, their fables have something of the intent, not entirely unamused wryness of, say, Zbigniew Herbert's. In "Parable I" the "missionary scribbles", those "old revisionists", derive "the word *Island* from roots in *eye* and *land*", and those who gloss the ancient texts enter into the battle between "subversives and collaborators" about the true "island story". In "From the Canton of Expectation" the post-war history of Ireland is figured as a grammar of clung verbal moods; pushing through optatives and imperatives, the poem ends up longing for the realistic heroism of the indicative. And "The Mad Vision" discovers contemporary Ireland as the postmortem, depleted betrayer of an ambivalent but potentially energizing visionary moment when it had been "as if a rose window of mud / I had invented itself out of the glittery dump / . . . snail-like yet lucid".

Such poems, with their ingenious allegorical worlds, constitute a new kind of political poetry for Heaney, and they make it clear that writing has, for him, a moral compulsion even deeper than the aesthetic compulsion of "Hailstones". "From the Frontier of Writing" articulates exactly this when, after describing Heaney's encounter with an army patrol, it turns the literal into the metaphorical: at the "frontier of writing", the experience "happens

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Handel's Operas 1704-1726

Winton Dean and John Merrill Knapp

'magnificent book . . . Dean and Knapp point out just where Handel's psychological insight and character development are most profound, and their defence of the operas proceeds from a deep respect for the care with which Handel contrived them. This is an indispensable book which reassures Handel's place as an opera composer who ranks alongside Monteverdi, Mozart, and Verdi.' Nicholas Kanyon, *The Observer*

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Ricks's is indeed a very English anthology. His poets are rooted in their own time and place, robustly sustained by their native soil. They care as little for the Continent as for the Celtic fringe: only in John Gray do we catch a whiff of Verlaine and Mallarmé. But we should not regard Yeats, in his new context, as an Irishman stranded among the English. For he is at first sight an exception of another kind; usually it is the English who yearn after Celtic twilight and raven-haired colleens in the mist, while the true Irish, with gloomy relish, depict a land sodden in rain, booze and guilt. Yeats is no counter-example, and not just for the reason that, like most Irish writers, he was English by race. Patriotic Irishmen and pixilated Englishmen have combined to obscure the fact that from his first self-conscious hours his boyhood home was in Bedford Park. Sign was the far, enchanted land where you went for long holidays with your grandparents. Yeats's curly verse makes sense once we see in it the *Welshwahrung* of Acton: maybe it's because he was a Londoner that he loved Ireland so. Q has him in context, with "Maureen" and "Aghadoo" by another resident of Bedford Park, the Anglo-Irish doctor, John Todhunter. This person also wrote Hellenic verse drama; his *Helen in Troas*, brilliantly produced by E. W. Gudwin, roused the young Yeats to transports of enthusiasm which were to embarrass him in later life.

Whereas Ricks gives Hardy a context, with Hopkins the effect is almost the opposite. In Q he merges into his surroundings. The only poem of his printed is "The Starlight Night": "O look at all the fire-folks sitting in the air... The dim woods quick with dianoid wells; the elf-eyes." For a moment we seem close to conventional fairy nature-whimsy. In Ricks, surrounded by wraithier company, Hopkins emerges the more strikingly distinct. This is surely the truer picture: the better we know him, the further does he seem from his contemporaries. Despite his contortions and complexities, he is in one sense more direct, more simply open than other Victorian poets; reading his works one sees plain a man unaffectedly filled with the love of God. At the same time there are more ideas and argument in him than in the others: though a great nature poet and a great devotional poet, he fuses his rapturous celebration of God and his world with a Platonic theory derived from the medieval schoolmen and modified by his own post-Romantic sensibility.

No other poet, either in Q or in Ricks, has such a philosophical bent. Mrs Guggenberger, as it happens, tries to think deep thoughts about Being; unfortunately her thoughts are guff. Housman spoke belatedly for much of the Victorian age when he said that the peculiar function of poetry was not to transmit thought but to transmute emotion. That is hardly as much as a half-truth: the very greatest poetry is marked by intellectual power. The approach to poetry implicit in Q's choices and explicit in Housman easily led to complex people trying to be simple, and clever ones pretending to be brainless. Ricks makes us see the keen edge of

the better Victorians, the acuity of their social perceptions; still, chewing upon the lyrics that he has so well selected, one nut seldom tastes the taste of a Snark, "meagre and hollow, and erisp". It is curious and revealing that Christianity is not more prominent in his anthology: his clerics, Barnes and Gray for instance, are mostly not devotional writers; Hopkins and Christinn Rossetti are his only religious poets of substance. And he has surely judged aright: the young men of the Oxford Movement (produced reams of verse, but none of the first order; poetry failed to give adequate expression to the theological storms that shook the age.

The Empire figures little in Ricks. The obvious exception is Kipling; but again one asks, How much of an exception? There are two modern upshots to the Kipling Problem. The first is to claim that it does not matter

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what the man says if he says it effectively. This was Auden's attitude in his elegy for Yeats: "Time that with this strange excuse / Pardoned Kipling for his views / And will pardon Paul Claudel / Pardon him for writing well." The other approach (which may seem to work for some of the verse but founders on the prose) is to deny that Kipling was such a brute after all: look at his sympathy for the lowly Indian and the common soldier, his satire on corruption in high places, and so on. Ricks's selection might seem to encourage this second approach. He prints four "imperial" poems, two of them about the army: "Gentlemen-Rankers" describes moral squalor and social degradation, "Danny Deever" a sordid murder and a public execution. "The Story of Uriah" deals with adultery and murder-in-all-but-name in India; that leaves only "Recessional" as a full-hearted hymn of empire. It is perhaps tempting to see this poem too, with its apocalyptic vision of empire's fall, its warnings against frantic boast and foolish word, as an attack upon conventional imperialism: tempting, but probably wrong, for a sense of menace, a whiff of fear - of Germany, Russia, America - is at the heart of the imperial mood. And how critical of army and empire are those other poems after all? If we knew nothing of their author, would we dignify them for the products of progressive ire? Not quite, I think: they disclose a relish for the brutalities of life that removes them far from Bloomsbury and the Fabian summer school. One can compare the jingo-sadomasochism of Newbolt's praise of an imperial God "Who built the world of strife, /

Who gave His children Pain for friend, / And death for surest hope of life". Still, the most full-throated cry of patriotic fervour in Ricks's anthology comes from, of all people, Hopkins, in the last stanza of *The Wreck of the Deutchland* with its rhapsodic prayer for "rare-dear Britain" and "English souls". It is one more example of his capaciousness: there is simply more in him than in anyone else.

Q's preface is of a piece with the verses that he prints, not surprisingly, since he was himself a Victorian poet - in his own estimation at least, for he chooses three of his own works for his collection. He is elegant, vague, soft-centred; and he addresses himself to a cultivated general public. Ricks is much cleverer and sharper, spiky, joky (there are some dreadful puns); his style is clumsier, and he writes for his fellow dons. He speaks of how "misprision" is used as a term of academic criticism; he enjoys discussing what Yeats said about what Verlaine said about Tennyson, what Eliot said about Tennyson, what Leavis said about Eliot. One is reminded of that rhyme (Victorian, indeed) about great fleas and little fleas and lesser fleas. Observing, shrewdly enough, that there is smugness in the modernist attack upon the Victorians, he says of one of Yeats's sentences, "Such a revolt against, essentially, complacency has since been seen to be open - like all accusations of complacency including this sentence - to the charge of complacency." This is painfully self-conscious: Ricks and Embarassment. In his very first paragraph he refers to the reviewers of his volume, a hint of intimidation in his voice.

From one point of view the difference between Q's preface and Ricks's demonstrates the difference between the Victorians and ourselves: between a dilettante culture (in the original sense of that word) and one in which literary taste is guided by a professional salaried intelligentsia, keenly interested in each other's doings. But for all that, Ricks's Victorians tend to be more like himself than they are like Q: acerbic, amusing, self-aware. They talk about one another: we have Hopkins on Wordsworth, Browning on Ruskin, Stevenson on Browning, Kingsley on Ruskin and Browning compared. Q's book is full of important names in another way. The list of his poets is rather like "Birthdays today" in *The Times*: some are included for their achievements, others for being nobles. He gives space to a marquess and a marquess's son, three earls, an earl's daughter, a countess, five peers of lower degree and eleven knights. From the peerage Ricks can manage only three barons, and of these two (Macaulay and Tennyson) got to the Lords on merit. Q printed poems by a prime minister, a prime minister's best man, a Viceroy of India, a secretary of state for the colonies, four Oxford Professors of Poetry, and at least seventeen clergy, including a couple of archbishops. Ricks preserves one Professor of Poetry (Arnold, of course) and a few of the clergy (no bishops); the rest - *à la Verlaine*. And of course he is right; but Q gives us, not by design, the ordinary pattern of

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Though he guillotines the aristocrats, Ricks does not fling his doors open to the workers. When he prints an anonymous satirical ballad on the birth of a Prince of Wales, it seems, like the middle classes at Belloc's garden-party, "out of place and mean. And horribly embarrassed". There is no sign of the music-hall, and very little of Victorian hymnody, the rhythms of which have sunk into the British collective psyche. I would guess that the best-known Victorian poems are "Good King Wenceslas" (J. M. Neale) and "All things bright and beautiful" (Mrs Alexander); Neale gets into Q, and so, as it happens, does Mrs Alexander's husband; neither is in Ricks.

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51pp. Faber. £7.95 (paperback, £3.95).
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The god Hermes figures centrally in "The Stone Verdict", one of Seamus Heaney's new poems, and there are good reasons for regarding him as the presiding genius of *The Haw Lantern*. Responsible for ensuring the departure of the souls of the dead to the underworld, he shadows the book's various memorial poems, notably the sonnet sequence "Clearances", written in memory of Heaney's mother. His name apparently deriving from the root for "stone" ("God of the stone heap", Heaney calls him), he stands over the book's frequent uses of stone as image, symbol and emblem; his resisting, dangerous obscurity is almost as necessary to *The Haw Lantern* as the yielding, preservative malleability of bog peat is to *North*. Above all, as the patron of writing and speech, whose signature may be read out of both "hermetic" and "henneneutic", he is very much the god of a book which sometimes enigmatically foregrounds the acts of writing and interpretation themselves, and whose strict moralism has its roots in the poet's "representative" speech.

The word "writing" (or one of its cognates) occurs ten times during the book's thirty-one poems, and there are frequent glimpses of the writer writing. These include, outstandingly, a prayer to his mother in the prefatory poem to "Clearances" that she might teach him to "strike it rich behind the linear black", as she once taught him how to split a coal block, and a poem in which a poet-analogue, the "stone grinder", tells us how "I prepared my surface to survive what came over it - / cartographers, printmakers, all that lining and inking": some of these new poems are slyly knowing about their own future as critical palimpsest. This

address to the act of writing makes newly and sophisticatedly salient the familiar vein of self-commentary in Heaney's poetry, and *The Haw Lantern* is, despite a title which oddly conjures up an earlier Heaney mode, a book very much of its literary-critical moment. Opening with a poem called "Alphabets" and closing with one called "The Riddle", it offers a more demanding scrutiny of writerly procedures - of "script" and "story" - than anything in Heaney's career to date.

In "Alphabets" the scripts are the complicatingly various ones of English, Latin and Irish which the young Heaney acquires in the classroom, first of all understanding his alphabets through his experience ("the forked stick that they call a Y"), and then interpreting his experience through script and print ("Bales drop bales like printouts where stooked sheaves / Made lambdas on the stubble once at harvest"). This exchange between world and word, experience and text, is uneasy and haunted by loss in *The Haw Lantern*; the poems have a very contemporary sense of how writing is elegy to experience. Indeed, what seems to me the book's finest poem, "Hailstones", discovers an exact figure for this in its first section when, it risks one of the central buzz-words of deconstruction:

I made a small hard ball
of burning water running from my hand
just as I make this now
out of the mesh of the real thing
smearing into its absence.

The Haw Lantern elsewhere reminds us that for Heaney the idea of writing as hurt "absent sense" has its specific cultural and linguistic signification: the Irish script - "this other writing" - which "Alphabets" describes as a "new code taught him how to split a coal block, and a poem in which a poet-analogue, the 'stone grinder', tells us how 'I prepared my surface to survive what came over it - / cartographers, printmakers, all that lining and inking': some of these new poems are slyly knowing about their own future as critical palimpsest. This

But "Hailstones" also makes it plain that Heaney's new writing inscribes more than

merely absence. In its third section it connects the original "smearing" experience of childhood with later sexual experience when it intones the way everything says "wait" after a hailstorm:

For what? For forty years

to say there, there you had
the truest forecast of your aftermath -
in that dilution
when the light opened in silence
and a car with wipers going stiff
hid perfect trucks in the slush.

The poem defends itself here as the arena in which the healingly interpretive powers of memory can be celebrated, in which apparently discrete experiences can be brought into significant relation by the almost surprised Rilkean delight of "saying there". The present perfection of the poem "Hailstones", which will continue to lay down its traces in time, its own perfect trucks in the slush, supplants and acts as consolation for the "perfect" hailstones of the poem's second section which were "in no time dirty slush".

The Haw Lantern is full of another kind of "saying": too, of saw, fable, instance, riddle and parable. "The Riddle" itself is a punningly titled poem: its "riddle" is at once the wire mesh in which someone in "that story" tried to carry water, and the riddling questions which this poem asks about "that story" ("Was it culpable ignorance, or was it rather / A *via negativa* through drops and let-downs?") It is a poem, therefore, about how you interpret a "story", and about how interpretation is a morally responsible act. Many poems in the book interpret old stories, particularly those of an earlier generation's classrooms: Constantine's miraculous writing in the sky; Diogenes and his lamp; Penelope at her shuttle; Socrates on his death-bed versifying Aeschylus; Wolfe Tone on the sea. There is also an example of that primary interpretive act, translation, in a version of the description of Scyld's "ship of death" in *Beowulf*.

Heaney's own contributions, in a group of "parable" poems, to this tradition of tale-telling supply *The Haw Lantern* with its most interesting stylistic development, and they demonstrate a new kind of poetic intelligence. These poems follow the invitations and promptings not of image but of fable, and they are written mainly in a bare, almost prosaically discursive form. Moralizing the fate of Ireland and the poet's responsibility, but unpresumptuously disguising their didacticism in allegory, they inherit some of the procedures of that post-war East European parable poetry which Heaney has recently glancingly discussed in his Eliot memorial lecture on Auden. They are diagnostic, analytic, dispassionate, admonitory, forensic and post-mortem. Nevertheless, their fables have something of the intent, not entirely unamused wryness of, say, Zbigniew Herbert's. In "Parable Island" the "missionary scribes", those "old revisionists", derive "the world island from roots in eye and hand", those who gloss the ancient texts enter into the battle between "subversives and enablers" about the true "island story". In "From the Canton of Expectation" the post-war history of Ireland is figured as a grammar of changing verbal mounds; pushing through optatives and imperatives, the poem ends up longing for the realistic heroism of the indicative. And "The Mud Vision" discovers contemporary Ireland as the posthumous, depleted betrayer of an ambivalent but potentially energizing visionary moment when it had been "as if a rose window of mud / Had invented itself out of the glittery damp / ... sullied yet lucid".

Such poems, with their ingenious allegorical worlds, constitute a new kind of political poetry for Heaney, and they make it clear that writing has, for him, a moral compulsion even deeper than the aesthetic compulsion of "Hailstones". "From the Frontier of Writing" articulates exactly this when, after describing Heaney's encounter with an army patrol, it turns the literal into the metaphorical: at the "frontier of writing", the experience "happens

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For common humanity

Perry Butler

EDWARD NORMAN

The Victorian Christian Socialists

251pp. Cambridge University Press. £17.90.
0 521 32515 3

For Marx, Christian Socialism was but "the holy war with which the priest consecrates the heart burnings of the aristocrat". Posterity has taken a more balanced view, but has tended, none the less, to see Victorian Christian Socialism as something of an enigma: too suspicious of political action, too clerical, lacking a real grasp of economics, unable to emancipate itself from the odour of condescension. Was it an attempt to Christianize socialism, spread socialism or make socialism more respectable in the Church? What did "Christian Socialism" mean to its exponents in any

devoted most of a chapter to this topic as part of his aim of showing that even the progressive social ideas and attitudes of the clergy were largely a reflection of class consciousness. Thus F. D. Maurice was, in fact, a Tory paternalist, and Brooke Foss Westcott, founder of the influential Christian Social Union, no socialist at all but a Chamberlain-style Liberal. In *The Victorian Christian Socialists* Dr Norman gives us a more considered, gentle and appreciative appraisal. In his view they were not socialist nor even political by most tests. Nevertheless their social vision has both importance and authenticity: in their social criticism they were true prophets discerning permanent truths about men. In fact the conventional socialist critique of their views highlights their very strength. "What they sought was not a collective way of restructuring society but a means of transforming its interior relationships through the recognition of common human elements more fundamental and durable than the accidents of shifting circumstances."

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A question of influence

Todd Endelman

PAUL JOHNSON
A History of the Jews
643pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £16.95.
0 297 79919 9

Paul Johnson's attempt to chronicle the full sweep of Jewish development is very much a throwback to earlier modes of doing Jewish history. He wants to "make sense" of the Jewish experience in its entirety. He asks questions that academic historians have generally forsworn, questions about the Jews' "rule", "purpose" and "significance" in the unfolding of history and about their "contributions" to Western civilization. Such questions are characteristic of the older, theologically oriented, apologetically motivated Jewish historiography that has fallen out of favour in academic circles. In posing them, Johnson renews a discussion that is endlessly fascinating to the faithful Jewish and Christian alike, but of almost no concern to historians who earn their living teaching Jewish history.

Johnson is also resolutely old-fashioned in attempting to compress the whole of Jewish history - from antiquity to the present, about 4,000 years in all - into a single volume. To do so requires overweening confidence - what the Jews call *chutzpah*. Few Jewish historians have attempted it, perhaps because they know too well how awesome the problems surrounding such an undertaking are. Johnson, though, has undred to go where others fear to tread and is to be congratulated for doing so. But a task such as his also requires, at the minimum, a familiarity with the literature, primary and secondary, in a variety of European languages as well as Hebrew, describing the history of the Jews in different lands and at different times. Judging from the errors and lacunae in his account - to which I shall soon return - it is clear that Johnson is unfamiliar with much of the best and most recent scholarship on a number of important topics.

He approaches his subject in an avowedly philo-Semitic spirit. In the prologue, he explains that he became interested in the history of the Jews when he became aware, while working on his *History of Christianity*, of "the magnitude of the debt Christianity owes to Judaism". This leads him to stress the contributions - theological, intellectual, artistic, economic - that Jews have made to Western civilization. For example, in discussing the history of ancient Israel, he emphasizes the uniqueness of biblical religion - the Israelite "discovery" of ethical monotheism, he writes, is "one of the great turning-points in history, perhaps the greatest of all" - underscoring what he believes to be its radical rejection of pagan practices and beliefs. In doing so, Johnson specifically rejects the perspective, common in much Protestant biblical scholarship, that stresses the indebtedness of Israelite religion to other Near Eastern civilizations. He points out, quite correctly, that scholars who stressed external influences and possible borrowings in the formation of Israelite religion, especially the pioneers of critical biblical studies in nineteenth-century Germany, were often motivated by hostility to contemporary Jews and thus inclined from the start to believe that neither Jews nor their ancestors were capable of authentic spiritual creativity. Johnson, however, has moved sharply in the opposite direction. He even repeats the old tale, beloved of Jewish grandmothers, that the Moses prohibition on eating the meat of swine derived from scientific knowledge, albeit crude, that pork, when undercooked, can harbour dangerous parasitic organisms. Views such as these

will give comfort to Jews and Christians of a fundamentalist bent who read sacred scripture literally. They will also undoubtedly please those Jews who believe that their security in an otherwise hostile Gentile society depends on proper recognition of their "contributions" to the development of the Western world.

Philo-Semitic approaches to Jewish history such as Johnson's resemble, oddly enough, antisemitic views in one major respect: both those who honour the Jews and those who hate them tend to exaggerate their role in world history, the former because they admire and respect Jewish influence, the latter because they fear and deplore it. For both, the Jews play a critical role in the history of the West, far out of proportion to their actual numbers, occupying the centre of the historical arena, influential, cohesive, resilient, perhaps somewhat mysterious. Neither views the Jewish people as "normal" - with the same mix of rich and poor, famous and obscure, talented and dull, intelligent and stupid, as other peoples; they stress, rather, the "abnormal", that is, those who make their mark in one way or another on the larger society.

Johnson's most serious distortion derives from his insistence that throughout their history the Jews have been a revolutionary people, destroying conventional beliefs and standards of behaviour, because they have had no share in existing arrangements. In his words, they have been "the yeast, producing decomposition of the existing order, the chemical agent of change in society", or, to use a different metaphor, they have been "natural iconoclasts" who "set about smiting and overturning all the idols of the conventional modes with skill and ferocious glee". In the ancient world, they created ethical monotheism; in the Renaissance and Reformation, they were "the fermenting yeast" that broke the monopoly of the Church of Rome; later they pioneered capitalism, revolutionary socialism, cultural modernism, and show business. In these claims there is some truth and much nonsense. That the Jewish people produced persons who questioned the conventional wisdom of their day is undeniable; that they did so in the modern period in disproportionate numbers is also beyond question. However, it is another matter altogether to claim, as Johnson does, that the Jews, as a people, are "natural iconoclasts" who have carried with them over the millennia, as they migrated from place to place, an innate inclination to upset the cart.

Whether intentionally or not, he leaves us with the impression that there is such a thing as a timeless, unchanging Jewish personality. To be sure, he does not attribute traits that he considers distasteful to the Jewish mind - although it is curious that a conservative should admire Jews for their alleged disrespect for convention and tradition. Still, he does posit a relatively fixed Jewish essence over the centuries. The core of this essence, according to Johnson, the trait that has supported their ongoing critique of the status quo, has been their eternal urge "to push forward the frontiers of reason". Moses initiated "the Jewish rationalization process" by introducing monotheism and linking it with ethics, succeeding because the people's "critical sense would not allow them to accept the follies of polytheism". Philo, Maimonides and Spinoza continued the work of rationalization in the theological sphere, while in the world of commerce, moneylenders and traders, driven by their urge to rationalize, demystified money, demolished old traditions and institutions, and improved existing commercial methods.

Only a very selective reading of Jewish history can yield conclusions such as these. It does not take a specialist knowledge of the subject

to know that the vast majority of Jews everywhere before the dawn of the modern age were firmly attached to the world of tradition, whose core was supernatural, not rational, religion. They were no more "natural iconoclasts" or "eternal protestants" than the majority among any other people. Johnson's belief that they were causes him repeatedly to exaggerate Jewish influence. To cite one blatant example: he asserts that Jews were in the forefront of economic development and innovation in London in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, although there is no evidence in recent historical literature (such as Harold Pollins's *Economic History of the Jews in England* or Gedalia Yagov's *Diamonds and Coral*) to support such a claim. The great majority of Jews in London at that time made their living in low-status street trades. If there was some natural inclination that made Jews innovative entrepreneurs, as Johnson would have us believe, it somehow skipped over this particular community. In fact, most Jews in the pre-emancipation period in Western and Central Europe were impoverished petty traders rather than clever merchants and brokers, a fact that it is impossible to know from Johnson's account, with its emphasis on Jewish "contributions" to the larger society.

In general, his preoccupation with the influence of Jews on Western civilization seriously distorts his reading of their history. It leads him to highlight world-historical personalities whose impact on Jewish society was marginal, like Spinoza, to whom he devotes five pages, while giving short shrift to leaders and movements that revolutionized Jewish life but had little influence on the larger course of events, such as Hasidism, which receives a scant three pages. Yet the latter movement changed the face of Russian and Polish Jewry, creating new forms of religious literature, communal leadership and personal devotion, while Spinoza's reasoned rejection of divine revelation and election, however influential in the history of European thought, made few converts among Jews at the time or a century later. Similarly, he writes at greater length about the Rothschilds (thirteen pages to be exact), the most potent symbols of Jewish "power" and "influence" in the popular mind in the nineteenth century, than he does about the crusaders for Jewish modernization in Western and Eastern Europe (the *maskilim*), whose programmes to broaden the cultural horizons of traditional Jewry he ignores almost completely.

Because Jewish interaction with high culture and national politics was greater in Western and Central Europe in the modern period than in Eastern Europe, Johnson devotes relatively little attention to the history of Jews in Russia and Poland, except for an account of their suffering at the hands of the Tsarist autocracy. This is no small omission. Aside from their demographic importance, the Jewish communities of the Tsarist empire were the most ideologically productive and culturally dynamic in the diaspora. Modern Jewish politics (nationalist and socialist) and literature (Hebrew and Yiddish) emerged there, not in assimilated communities in more tolerant lands. More than a decade and a half before Theodor Herzl (whom Johnson credits with launching Jewish nationalism almost single-handedly) convened the first Zionist congress, secular ideologists in the Pale of Settlement, like Leo Pinsker and Moshe Leib Lilienblum, were laying the intellectual foundations for the return to Zion and the creation of a Jewish state. Indeed, Herzl's ideas would have fallen on deaf ears in Russia and Poland had the way not been prepared by prior agitation on the part of the Hibbat Tsiyyon (Love of Zion) movement. To ignore the emergence of a secular political and literary culture in what was the largest Jewish community in Europe is to distort radically the course of modern Jewish history.

This kind of distortion arises from Johnson's concern with Jewish "contributions" to Western civilization. The Jews of Eastern Europe - unemancipated, Yiddish-speaking for the most part, unintegrated socially and culturally into the fabric of the larger society - failed to produce their share of Disraelis, Marxes and Heines and so do not merit the same attention as communities that did. Given this standard, it should be no surprise that Johnson moves rapidly through those periods in history when

Jews failed to make their mark on the majority society. The 1,700 years between the origins of Christianity and the beginnings of the modern period receive less than half the space allotted to the two centuries since the French Revolution. The emergence of rabbinic Judaism with its revolutionary concept of oral law, the formation of the liturgy, the development of medieval biblical and Talmudic exegesis - all of which played a critical role in the preservation of the Jewish people over the centuries, a theme supposedly central to Johnson's account - are virtually ignored. Rashi (1040-1105), whose biblical and Talmudic commentaries are the bedrock of all later Jewish exegesis, is not even mentioned. The irony here is that Rashi, perhaps more than other medieval Jewish thinkers, did have an impact outside Jewish circles, numerous Christian commentators having been influenced by his biblical commentary.

Were Johnson's account marred only by its peculiar emphases, it might still be possible to recommend it to readers seeking a quick, though idiosyncratic, tour of Jewish history, for it is written in a lively, engaging manner. Unfortunately, it also contains numerous errors of fact, which in an introductory work for non-specialists is especially regrettable. To cite only a few examples from the last sections of the book: he states, quite incorrectly, that the majority of rabbis everywhere in the diaspora were taken in by the seventeenth-century false Messiah Shabbetai Zevi; that Hasidism spread westward into Germany; that Moses Mendelssohn was ignorant of traditional Jewish culture; that the conservative *maskil* Hartwig Wessely wanted "to scrap" the Torah and the Talmud and embrace natural religion; that the Tsarist government sponsored the pogroms of 1881; that Bernard Lazare's real name was Baruch Hagani; and that the English Rothschilds systematically destroyed their business and personal papers in periodic holocausts. It would be possible, though it would serve no purpose, to list many other errors of fact, some major, some minor, but by now the point should be clear: Johnson's grasp of the material is not as sure as his confident tone would suggest. Readers in search of more balanced, though less flashy, one-volume history of the Jews will be better served by Robert M. Seltzer's *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish experience in history*.

There is, however, one redeeming feature to Johnson's unfamiliarity with contemporary scholarship on Jewish history. Precisely because he is a relative newcomer to the field, he is not hampered by reigning orthodoxies in matters of interpretation and thus occasionally offers a dissenting view that is fresh, stimulating, and possibly even correct. This is certainly true in regard to the origins of Jewish modernity. With a few exceptions, specialists in modern Jewish history have focused on the revolution in Jewish self-consciousness initiated by Moses Mendelssohn and the *maskilim* in Germany as the beginning of the modern era for European Jewry, viewing it as the decisive break with traditional patterns of life and thought. At the same time, they have tended to ignore the growth of new Jewish communities in more tolerant surroundings - in England and her North American colonies - where Jewishness was never the issue that it was on the Continent. Johnson, on the other hand, grasps how radically different political and social conditions were in America and, to a lesser extent, Britain, and how these differences shaped Jewish life in these lands. He suggests that Georgian England was the first place in which a modern Jewish community emerged, since here Jews became citizens, subject only to the same disabilities as others who dissented from the Church of England, long before they did in France or any of the German states. And in America, he suggests, Jews could achieve, for the first time, active integration into the larger society without having to renounce their religion.

These insights, so obvious in one sense, have eluded many well-respected scholars in the field, largely because they are accustomed to gauging transformations in Jewish life by the appearance of new intellectual programmes rather than by broadly based shifts in actual behaviour. Johnson's distance from the field in this one instance actually enhances his rendering of Jewish history.

About-turn in the Spanish Church

Denis Smyth

FRANCES LANNON
Privilege, Persecution, and Prophecy: The Catholic Church in Spain, 1875-1975
276pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £27.50.
0 19 821923 7

Perhaps in Spain alone in western Europe during the 1970s could the publication of an episcopally approved homily on soteriology have provoked a personal protest from the prime minister of the country. Yet Carlos Arias Navarro, who served as premier in the period immediately before and after Franco's death, did not hesitate to condemn Bishop Añoveros of Bilbao for permitting the priests of his diocese to preach to their Basque congregations, on Sunday February 24, 1974, about the mission of the Catholic Church as a saviour of the linguistic, political and cultural rights of ethnic minorities, as well as of individual souls. Alarmed at this public espousal of the cause of ethnic nationalism only weeks after the assassination of his predecessor, Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, by the Basque separatist organization, ETA, Arias Navarro officially directed Bishop Añoveros to quit Spain. However, supported by his fellow bishops, Añoveros announced that he would only leave if commanded to do so by the Pope. Paul VI maintained a resounding silence and the Franco régime was forced to back off. As Frances Lannon notes in *Privilege, Persecution and Prophecy: The Catholic Church in Spain, 1875-1975*, "no single incident better illustrated the end of the old Church-state alliance in Spain".

Indeed, the ineptness of the effort to deal with a "turbulent" priest like Añoveros indicated the unprecedented character of the challenge presented to the Francoist ruling élite in its last years by an increasingly disaffected clergy and laity. The very Church which had been rescued from the secularizing Second Republic's threat to its privileged place within society in general, and the educational system in particular, and the lives of most of whose priests and nuns had been saved from the slaughter which killed thirteen bishops, 4,184 diocesan priests, 2,365 male religious and 283 religious sisters inside Republican areas during the Civil War, by the victory of Francoist arms, was now deserting the régime which had given it such protection. This ingratiation must have seemed all the more inexplicable to a régime

which had granted privileges and powers to the Catholic Church to an extent unique even in modern Spanish history. For, again as Dr Lannon records, Franco was ready to reward a Catholicism which had "served as a positive ideological focus" for the various interests in conflict with the radicalism of the Republic. The "New Spain" reversed the anticlerical legislation of the Republic, by abolishing civil marriage and divorce, by restoring State salaries for the clergy and by reinstating, and even reinforcing, the Church's role in education at all its levels. Moreover, Franco concluded a series of agreements with the Vatican culminating in the concordat of 1953, which formally recognized in its first article the confessional

unity of Spain as a Catholic country, thereby realizing a long-standing integrist goal of suppressing the very limited religious freedom granted to the private practice of other faiths by the Restoration Monarchy's constitution of 1876. Again, every facility was given to the Church to reconvert the secularized and/or irreligious northern urban and southern rural masses.

Although there were some instances of tension in Church-State relations in the 1940s and 50s, particularly those emanating from the crusty anti-Erastianism of Cardinal Archbishop Segura of Seville, who was wont to remind his flock that Franco's title of "Caudillo" had been applied by St Ignatius of



John Heartfield's montage, subtitled "The crucifix was not yet heavy enough", uses Tharvaldsen's painting of Christ. It is reproduced from Photomontage: A political weapon by David Evans and Sylvia Gold (128pp. Gordon Fraser. £15; paperback, £9.95. 0 86092 088 7).

Movements of conscience

Malise Ruthven

JIM OBELKEVICH, LYNDALE ROPER and RAPHAEL SAMUEL (Editors)
Disciplines of Faith: Studies in religion, politics and patriarchy
581pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul. Paperback, £10.95.
0 7102 0750 6

The publication of this book, based on the Religion and Society History Workshop held in 1983, is a welcome indication that the traditional opposition of the Left towards religion is eroding. As the editors, Jim Obelkevich, Lyndale Roper and Raphael Samuel, point out in their introduction, hostility towards organized religion was until recently a "leitmotif of the socialist movement, as of the various forms of popular radicalism from which it drew its strength". As the child (or grandchild) of the Enlightenment, socialism stood for reason against revelation, science against superstition, predicting the inevitable demise of "mystical", "obscurantist" and other "irrational" modes of thought in the New Enlightenment that would follow the Revolution. This vision of the socialist dawn, however, as the more discerning intellectuals on the left have often pointed out, was itself closely allied to religious modes of thought, which promised a secular version of the Millennium in which all things would be made even. This in turn raised questions about the origins of religion itself and its revolutionary potential. A classic socialist

statement, Kautsky's *Foundations of Christianity* (1908), saw in early Christianity a primitive form of revolutionary communism which was later transformed by the Fathers into the "most tremendous instrument of domination and exploitation in the world". For Kautsky, as for Lunacharsky (the first Soviet Commissar for Education), "true" religion, stripped of false doctrines and unnecessary hierarchical accretions, was socialism.

The development of liberation theology in Latin America, an activist Catholicism linked to the free trades union movement in Poland, the strong Christian presence in the anti-nuclear movements in the West - not to mention the Iranian revolution and the spread of a militant anti-Western Islamic radicalism throughout the Muslim world - have blurred any obvious distinctions between "progressive" and "reactionary" Churches. The struggle against war, capitalism, exploitation, imperialism and male domination, and the other grand causes of the Left, are now being fought as much between Churches and among clergies as in old-fashioned confrontations between the secular and the religious.

Thus in the United States, the world's most secular polity and its most affluent society, a "red" archbishop is now effectively silenced by the Pope, not the government, for preaching against the Bomb, while Churches of all denominations offer sanctuary to Latin Americans whose Reagan-sanctioned and otherwise regarded as dangerous communists and others regard the New Right as its ills; while conversely the New Right also finds its favourite doctrines against feminism, sex education, homosexuality, abortion and the theory of evolution on religious radio and television.

vision and use millennialist passages from the Bible (once favoured mainly by optimists on the Utopian Left) to justify both traditional forms of bigotry and doomsday scenarios which all but welcome the prospect of nuclear war as a prelude to the Second Coming.

It is all highly confusing and fraught with ambiguity, and more complicated than traditional Leftist analysis, inspired by Marx's famous "opium", has been able to cope with. The editors of *Disciplines of Faith* are candid about the difficulties. "The dialectics", they write,

whether between the conscious and the unconscious, society and self, masculine and feminine, ideal and real, are not those with which social historians, Marxist or otherwise, have been particularly well-equipped to deal. They evidently fall short of, or transcend, the line of class.

Because of the uncertainty about the extent to which all of this is "historic terrain" and the editors' insistence on including a broad sample of feminist writing in the collection, the range of topics covered is remarkably large. It includes family life, sexuality, feminism, popular piety, colonialism, the Reformation, revivalism, Catholicism, radicalism, nationalism, fascism and even music and art. This insistence on having something for everyone may please the publishers by increasing the potential market for the book. But it detracts from any hope that a common thread or collection of themes will emerge with clarity. A more rigorous editorial policy might have cast the net less widely and more deeply in trawling for items conforming to the Workshop's stated "recogni-

tion of the power of religion as a shaping force of politics in the contemporary world". The selection of papers, moreover, seems somewhat arbitrary and unbalanced: it is odd for example, that a book on religion with a decidedly feminist outlook is content to explore the significance of the Blessed Virgin in Santa Francesca Romana without examining one of the female prophets in the Protestant tradition: a paper on Mother Ann Lee and the Shakers, that Utopian community so much admired by Engels, could have explored its feminine approach to deity, sexual politics as socialism much more effectively than Phyllis Mack's vacuous witterings about the significance of "feminine" behaviour among Franciscans, Quakers and the followers of Gandhi. Although there are excellent papers on religious sociology (notably James Auer's essay on a fundamentalist community in Massachusetts), there is none which addresses itself to the most basic of the questions raised by religious experience: the way in which the subjective and personal has impacts on social reality, to create "objective" changes in the world. The mystic call, wrote Louis Massignon, is a reference to Islamic Sufism, is the result of inner rebellion of the conscience against social injustices, not only of others, but primarily particularly of one's own. Religious reform of all times and ages have held it as axiomatic that the individual must change himself before he can change society. The natural such personal transformation, and the symbolic languages through which they are mediated, would be as fruitful an area of study as socialism for the rest of us.

Of course, such a profound reorientation in the attitude of Spanish Catholicism was fraught with danger and difficulty. Indeed, Lannon argues convincingly that the bishops crucially missed a chance to assume a leading role in the process of democratization in the late 1960s by refusing to allow Catholic labour organizations to spearhead the fight for workers' rights. By the early 1970s there was a progressive majority within the Spanish Episcopal Conference but, by then, the opportunity was gone and the critical battles for trade-union and other civil rights would be waged by activists who hailed from such organizations as the Communist-led Workers Commissions.

However, as Dr Lannon also emphasizes, the Church adapted sufficiently to the new order to be able to gain a respected place from which to champion traditional Catholic values and interests in a democratic, pluralistic Spain ruled by a socialist government. Her authoritative account of this fascinating process of institutional and ideological transformation is distinguished by its erudition and judiciousness. It is a worthy successor, in both chronological and scholarly senses, to William J. Callahan's *Church, Politics and Society in Spain, 1750-1874* (reviewed in the TLS, February 8, 1985).

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All summer in a stroke

Mick Imlah

MICHAEL DAVIE and SIMON DAVIE (Editors)
The Fisher Book of Cricket
Mopp, Fisher, £9.95,
0571 147771

The purest cricket reading is the scorecard. No two have ever been the same, and the elaborate statistical machinery that informs them is the special delight of the game. Wisden, the legendary annual, is an unglorified scorebook. We think of cricket as a writer's game partly because anything written about it, over and above the plain eloquent facts and figures, is so self-consciously literary. This suits Michael Davie, senior editor of a smart new anthology, *The Fisher Book of Cricket*; he is as much a fan of Eng Lit as he is of cricket, and the writers represented here are as much his heroes as the cricketers – often, they are the cricketers (Wodehouse, Sassoon, Pinter). The Master, in this anthology, could be Jack Hobbs, but it could equally be Joseph Conrad, spotted by E. V. Lucas in the crowd at Canterbury ("Cricket was strange to him . . ."). If a first-rank author goes anywhere near a bat, he's in. On second-rank: there's a bit of Macfield which Davie owns is "the worst complete ever written about cricket" (though he prints two, equally feeble). A picnic scene from Tennyson's *The Princess* is included for a relevant half-line fairly described as "ill-informed". Not much cricketing interest will be got from the Joyce, the Dylan Thomas, the Gilbert White, or the joke of Stoppard's on display here, just as there is no literary element in (say) Don Bradman's verbal diagram of his own pull-shot. E. M. Forster puts a cricket match in *Maurice* to exploit the metaphor of an assaulted but unbroken partnership; it is some of the weakest writing in that book, and the least convincing cricket in this. We must allow the editor his literary coup, an uncollected account by the undergraduate Evelyn

Wagh of a village match he hadn't enjoyed; but the thing itself is poor predictable campiness ("I had suffered acute pain in my great toe" etc).

Cricket offers such scope to the inventor that we feel there ought to be good cricket fiction. Imaginary cricket games have been the resort of many a creatively disturbed adolescence. Thomas Kenally played HOWZAT (dice cricket) with teams of writers and composers; it was a barren series for Hardy, while Bonudin plundered centuries at number eight. But nothing printed by Davie suggests that cricket has made a worthwhile contribution to adult fiction. Instead, we have extracts from examples of that limited subgenre, the cricket story: MacDonnell of course; and Conan Doyle's "Story of Spedgrie's Dropper", which starts well, though the start is all we are given. Verse yields even less; apart from a nice one by Alun Ross and Gavin Ewart's ambitions "The Sadness of Cricket", the poems here are dreary or hackneyed or both, though Irene Murrell's "Boycott in the West Indies" is in a class of its own, a real stinker. On this evidence, the bulk of successful cricket writing is related to journalism rather than to any of the "higher" forms.

When writers turn to cricket, for better or worse, and whether because it's just a game or more than just a game, they tend to suspend their discrimination and operate in an atmosphere of pure, sunny celebration. The editor thinks harshly that his old mentor, Edmund Blunden, had "too roseate" a view of the game, which he links to a need for an image of peace after the Great War. In fact, Blunden's characterization of his village side's play, "rather a grave affair . . . rather a continuation of rural labours than a sport and pastime", is in welcome contrast to some of the Golden Age hyperbole in the book. This is Andrew Lang, for example: "There is no talk, none so witty and brilliant, that is so good as cricket talk, when memory sharpens memory, and the dead live again . . .". Such bliss in the



Jack Hobbs showing how, at the Duke of York's Harrows, Chelsea, 1936; reproduced from *Startling with Grace: A pictorial celebration of cricket, 1864-1986* by Bob Willis and Patrick Murphy (188pp, with 177 black-and-white and 24 colour photographs. Stanley Paul, £14.95, 0 09 166100 5).

pavilion can turn to drivel on the page: R. C. Robertson-Glasgow wryly finds Frank Woolley "impossible to write about" because of the number of superlatives called up by even the briefest innings – but he goes for it anyway: "there was nil summer in a stroke by Woolley, and he batted as is sometimes shown in dreams".

Was, summer, dreams – that's the trick: to make the reader nostalgic for things he never knew. But writing about Old Cricket, the game before Grace and photography, works differently; the great underarm bowler David Harris stays out of sight, even in Nyren's loving portrait, because it is impossible now to imagine an effective underarm action – such as the one which "struck off" two fingers from "Long" Robinson's right hand.

If this anthology reaffirms the commonplace

of a Golden Age in cricket from 1890 to 1914 (is it a coincidence that cricket flourished while literature was in the doldrums?) then it does so with many respectful nods to the invisible early days, and with other moral qualifications. Neville Cardus sees the Victorians "changing the lusty game that Squire Osbaldeston knew into the most priggish of the lot", on the same ideological line, but more detached, George Orwell prematurely diagnoses the game's demise: "It is not a twentieth-century game, and nearly all modern-minded people dislike it. The Nazis for instance . . .". C. L. R. James observes more quietly "the way in which at any particular period [cricket] reflects tendencies in the national life".

James here echoes part of the anthologists' declared aim. They have divided the book, not chronologically, but into thematic groups – Violence, Memory, etc – in order to explore cricket's "connection with the rest of life". The final theme, Sadness, is prefigured in Skid Berry's account of a Pakistan club side's one and only first-class match, lost by an innings and 851 runs. Bowler Inayat (1-279) takes it badly, and permanently: "an intense sadness shrouded him. He spoke in the local tongue, sove for the odd word in English and the one sentence: 'The fielding was very poor.' He estimated that eleven or twelve catches were dropped, one of them Pervaz Akhtar (337) before he had made 10, off his own bowling . . .". But this sadness is still to do with what went on in the middle, a matter only of grotesque statistics, and ultimately comic. The real "Sadness of Cricket", in the title of Gavin Ewart's anecdotal survey, is the sadness of everything else: of illness, disgrace, madness, of coming wars, of the fact that the game is over. The most affecting things in this book are those which point the distance between game and earnest, like a description of Grace on his deathbed, in 1915, superfluously scared by the air-raids:

"You can't be frightened of aeroplanes, old man," said his visitor. "You, who had Jones bowling through your beard."
"That was different", he answered. "I could see that Jones, and what he was at. I can't see the aeroplanes."

Creation of Lord's

A. L. Le Quesne

TONY LEWIS
Double Century: The story of MCC and cricket
375pp, Hodder and Stoughton, £14.95,
0340 383364

Tony Lewis celebrates the bicentenary of the Marylebone Cricket Club with a large, handsome and generously produced volume, replete with good photographs, coloured illustrations and Ardiszone-ish endpapers and dust-jacket. That task he has set himself has its problems, however. One is the level to pitch it at: is this a work of record, fully researched and aspiring to stand as the definitive word on its subject? It is not, and Lewis, who is not a professional historian, very sensibly makes no pretence that it is. His strengths are that he has been a distinguished professional cricketer and that he knows the game, and the MCC itself, from the inside. He has written a robust and vigorous book aimed to give the general cricket-reading public a broad outline of the history of the oldest and by far the most prestigious cricket club in the world, and his decision simply justifies itself, even if it occasionally leaves the more oculemic reader naid for a deeper investigation of some of the intriguing themes of British social and sporting history that it glances at in passing.

A second problem is very clearly suggested by the subtitle of *Double Century: The story of MCC and cricket*, and here Lewis's solution is less happy. It is indeed true that the MCC is an extraordinary institution. No other major sport known to me has developed to anything like the same extent under the aegis of a single private club, and only in a society as intensely aristocratic as nineteenth-century Britain could it have happened. The MCC has been so central to the development of cricket, at all levels, and especially at first-class level, that

the last few years, that is, when – as Lewis brings into sharp focus – the club has recently been short of most of its powers, that it is very hard to disentangle its history from the general history of the game. Even so, I think Lewis has been self-indulgent here: he too often wanders beyond the story of the club into the almost illimitable field of the story of cricket itself, and having done so, understandably finds it hard to know where to stop.

Lewis brings out well the main stages in the club's development, though – he is particularly interesting on the way in which the MCC, thanks primarily to W. G. Grace and to the then Secretary, R. A. Fitzgerald, reasserted its authority over the game in the 1860s at a time when this was being challenged by the emergence of touring professional "circuses" very strongly reminiscent of the more successful Packer rebellion of the 1970s. As the author of an official history, he is inevitably under some restraints, but he is not mealy-mouthed and is not afraid to criticize, both by statement and by implication, the MCC's handling of some of the less happy incidents in which it has been involved, notably the bodyline débacle. Even more interesting, because less well covered by other accounts, is his treatment of the controversial issues which have hung thick about Lord's in recent years – the throwing affair of the late 1950s and early 1960s, the breakdown of cricketing contacts with South Africa following the D'Oliveira scandal (as it can rightly be called) of 1968, and the erosion of the MCC's own authority with the successive emergence of the Test and County Cricket Board and the Cricket Council and the increasing dominance of this latter body by the representatives of the former. The last-named issue, in particular, continues to leave a trail of hard feelings and distinguished corpses behind it. But Lewis does not shirk these problems, and his handling of them does much to add interest to what is already an illuminating and attractive book.

Establishment unshaken

John Turner

PHILIP KNIGHTLEY and CAROLINE KENNEDY
An Affair of State: The Profumo case and the framing of Stephen Ward
268pp, Cape, £12.95,
0224 023470
ANTHONY SUMMERS and STEPHEN DORRIL
Honeytrap: The secret world of Stephen Ward
264pp, Weidenfeld, £12.95,
02979 1222

Both *An Affair of State* and *Honeytrap* are produced, packaged and priced in anticipation of a large sale in high-street bookshops. The packaging is sex among the political elite, with the extra frisson that what is described is most probably not fictitious. The interplay between sex and politics has been the source of much enlightenment about the human condition – Kenneth Ballhatchet's study of the British in India, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj* (1980) never being an example – but sexuality has never been a particularly interesting characteristic of the twentieth-century British politician. Nor is there much evidence of profound changes over time. Although the twenty-year period between the abandonment of Christian hypocrisy and the onset of AIDS has supposedly been a window of opportunity for the sexually incontinent of all classes, there is little obvious difference between the opulent debaucheries chronicled in both of these books and the home life of our own Mrs Cynthia Payne. The Conservatives have since the war set the pace in sexual irregularity. By subscribing to the values of Victorian Liberalism they have apparently signed up also for Sir Charles Dilke (three in the bed) and Lyndy George (never more than one at a time, but plenty of them). As befits the party of the family, their legislation extended the benefits of permissiveness to adulterous heterosexual males, while continuing to punish prostitutes and homosexuals.

The Profumo case was unusual, in that it might seem rather unwise for a Cabinet minister to share a mistress with a Russian spy, but compared with the other security "lapses" of the Establishment, such as Philby, Burgess, Maclean and Blunt, it was hardly significant. There is therefore not much to be squeezed from a re-examination of the Profumo affair itself, or the sexual proclivities of the politicians of the early 1960s and their hangers-on. One point of importance, merely hinted at by these authors, is that in the days of Stephen Ward and John Profumo sexual exploitation and class exploitation ran more perfectly in parallel: opportunistic working-class girls, escaping from poverty and boredom in little Thames Valley towns like Egham and Staines, charged money for services which a later generation of politicians could expect for nothing from their social equals. Nothing much else has changed.

The greater interest would therefore seem to lie in the implications of the Ward case for the structure of power in Britain in and after the 1960s. Ward, it will be remembered, was an osteopath whose clients included a wide range of society figures, including Lord Astor, who lent him a cottage on the Cliveden estate. He also drew portraits, with members of the Rymal Family among his clients. He amused himself in a *demi-monde* which he shared with many of his clients; and in July 1961 he introduced Christine Keeler to Profumo, who was then Minister for War. Miss Keeler was also involved, to some degree, with Captain Ivanov, the Russian naval attaché. In January 1963 the relationship between Keeler, Profumo and Ivanov was rumoured in the press, after an incident at Ward's flat in which Keeler was shut at by a former lover. In March Profumo denied in the House of Commons that he had had an affair with Christine Keeler. In June, pursued among others by Labour politicians warned by Ward, he admitted that he had lied, and resigned. On June 8 Ward was charged with living off immoral earnings. On July 31, 1963, after

his conviction on two charges but before sentence was passed, he took an overdose of barbiturates from which he died.

Honeytrap and *An Affair of State* both expound the theory that Ward was framed, and that his involvement with Keeler and Ivanov was managed by M15 in an attempt to compromise a Russian agent. Ward also evidently played some role with Ivanov in transmitting diplomatic material between Russia and the Foreign Office. Philip Knightley and Caroline Kennedy share the belief of Anthony Summers



Christine Keeler, 1959; reproduced from *An Affair of State*, reviewed here.

and Stephen Dorril that Profumo's intervention spoiled the operation, and that Ward was persecuted by the "establishment" in revenge for his part in humiliating Profumo, while M15 markedly failed to protect him, and his wealthy friends abandoned him with indecent haste. All of this is perfectly plausible and well documented. The disappointment of the two books is that none of this is either very surprising or very new. It has long been obvious that the Establishment is devious and incompetent,

with its full share of drunkards and sexual eccentrics. "Old Corruption" merely does what it knows best, and exposure is very unlikely to stop it.

Why then are such efforts necessary? The two books noticed here inevitably have a great deal in common. Their sources are remarkably similar. Both rely heavily on interviews with survivors, and a number of the more prominent sources clearly spoke to both sets of authors. Knightley and Kennedy seem to have a longer and more comprehensive list. Both books have used FBI material released under the Freedom of Information Act. Both quote extensively from contemporary newspaper reports and other well-known published sources. Where Kennedy and Knightley have their tape-recordings of Ward, Summers and Dorril have his "unpublished memoir" and a manuscript from the English prostitute of Czechoslovakian extraction, Mariella Novotny. As a result they hardly differ in their account of the main events, and the direct conflicts are trivial. The "Man in the Mask" in the epynymous orgy was either a Sheffield business man (Knightley and Kennedy) or "Puffin" Aspinth (Summers and Dorril); but it was certainly not Ernest Marples. Roma Riccio had ACAB (for All Coppers Are Bastards) either tattooed on her wrist (Summers and Dorril) or written in indelible ink on her stomach (Knightley and Kennedy). Summers and Dorril are much more informative about their sources and provide a good if rather padded bibliography. They are more open about naming names, including names of M15 officers, despite their pretentious use of dashes to indicate "names deleted for legal reasons". On the other hand, they are more inclined to believe whatever they have read or been told, so some of their reconstructions are more elaborate and breathless than the evidence can justify. Nothing of importance is revealed by the new information which was not foreshadowed by Ludovic Kennedy in 1963 or Chapman Pincher and "Nigel West" in the early 1980s.

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American notes

Christopher Hitchens

An extraordinary essay by Ted Solotaroff, published in the June 8 issue of the *New Republic* and entitled *The Literary-Industrial Complex*, could hardly have come at a more appropriate moment. Almost every day brings news of a fresh takeover, buyout or merger and it is rare to have a friend in publishing who is doing the same job as he or she was doing a year ago. Solotaroff, who came to publishing via the New American Library and who founded the *New American Review*, now works at Harper and Row. His is not the work of a congenial "small house" him. But as he says, there is a price to be paid for the homogenization of marketing (about which I have written before). That price is the homogenization of production:

The mass market of the shopping mall has proved to be the Great Leveler of the publishing business. The long-standing identities that derived from the houses' traditional interests and purposes have eroded, along with their backlists. With a few exceptions, the major houses today are virtually indistinguishable. Like members of a football team in the huddle, the publishing players are distinguished from one another mainly by their size and numbers (that is, volume of sales). Authors, publishers and editors move from one house to another without missing a beat. Why shouldn't they? The discourse they've felt is the one they find: the subtle novel is a "rough sell", the one that isn't immediately topical is "marginal", the crudely-written, heavily plotted one is a "great read"; the slick one, in which, typically, a gimmick meets a fad, is "popcorn".

You may feel that you have read something like this before. But Solotaroff is not just entering a protest or lamenting the lost days of the gentleman-publisher. He points out that while "publishers have been able to put out many more of the mass merchandise titles for which the chains have expanded the market, they are also taking book returns that are three and four times what they used to be. Even by corporate standards profit margins remain slim and capricious." And it remains true that big houses have shorter memories, and can make gigantic mistakes based on what they consider to be "hard-headed" calculations. Some of the huge

publishers pay an oblique compliment to the idea of the small house, by giving distinguished editors their own imprints. But to speak generally, Solotaroff is right to say that the mass-market editor "tends to be uncounseled by himself and others, and to rely upon signals from the best-seller lists and the in-house authorities to counter a chronic low-grade panic".

The best analogy may be with contemporary Wall Street, where the mania for mergers and quick returns brought bankruptcy and corruption rather than rationalization. If publishing does take that direction, it will not be able to say that it wasn't warned.

★ ★ ★

On the other hand, there remains something indefatigable about the small and independent press. An encouraging new contestant is Prometheus Books, operating from the legendary unprincipled city of Buffalo, New York. Residents of Buffalo are used to unfeeling inks about cruel weather and chronic rust and decline, and presumably Paul Kurtz, the founding publisher, has the necessary immunity.

In the recent past, Prometheus has brought out Lionel Abel's collection of essays *Impudent Nonsense*, which came with the largest and funniest erratum slip I have ever seen ("Line 4 should read 'revolt'. Therefore nonsense has had an importance on which it could hardly"). At certain points in the text, emendations had actually been pasted over by hand. All this spoke of an encouraging energy and commitment.

Of late, Prometheus has spruced up its net. It

has been producing a very promising series of books that attack the popularity of mysticism, cultism and superstition in American life. These include *Salvation for Sale*, written by a former producer of Pat Robertson's electronic pulpit show, and a series of exposures of the same kind. The most ambitious of this series, and the most lavishly produced, is *Disciples of Destruction: The religious origins of war and terrorism*. Written by Charles W. Sutherland, this is an all-points attack on fundamentalism in every guise. The secular tradition is a very strong one in the United States but its voice has been rather muted lately. By any standard of cultural augury, the time must be ripe for a revolt against Elmer Gantryism and its tone and conduct.

Prometheus Books (which is also bringing out the latest collection of Mrs Thatcher's speeches) may be found at 700 East Amherst Street, Buffalo, New York 14215.

★ ★ ★

In one of the many retrospectives that have been published on the twentieth anniversary of *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, someone asked the opinion of the then *New York Times* reviewer, Richard Goldstein, who had said of the album in 1967 that it was "an unmitigated collection of work". Now he takes it all back. "The work is an enormous success", he says. "I was wrong. 'Canossa ain't what it used to be'."

★ ★ ★

Another possible stir in the zeitgeist is sug-

gested by Georgetown University, which is launching the *Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics*. Published by the Law Centre at the university, the journal will be a quarterly and will also be the first and only review ever to make the conduct of the profession its chief concern. The inaugural issue contains several articles on conflict of interest and a daring essay by Professor Larry Subin of New York University, arguing that lawyers do not have the right to knowingly state falsehoods as the truth. Both the American Bar Association and the Association of Trial Lawyers of America have endorsed the journal and provided funds for it. With the present glut of students graduating from law schools, the field of legal ethics is a promising one, giving every indication of providing steady work. Only a few weeks ago, two of the country's leading law firms agreed to settlements of \$34.3 million for ethical misconduct resulting in the near collapse of Maryland banking and Chicago real estate. There's plenty for everyone.

★ ★ ★

Bloomsbury went off nicely this year. Radio Station WBAI in New York, which does an annual marathon reading of *Ulysses* on the air, was warned by the Federal Communications Commission that it might be violating obscenity guidelines. The FCC was asked to state which passages might be risky, and lofly replied that that would be telling. By threatening to bring a First Amendment case during which the whole book would be read in court, the station struck a blow against prior restraint and secured a climbdown.

What Roy Foster calls "the institutionalized pieties" of Irish history are an enemy she shares with other contributors; but the revisionism he depicts as the norm among modern historians ("We Are All Revisionists Now") is still sufficiently unpopular to make the tone of his own essay defensive. "In a country that has come of age, history need no longer be a matter of guarding sacred mysteries".

In a country where history is still a daily matter of life and death, it is not surprising if much of the cultural debate has the quality of hand-to-hand combat; and some of the blows struck here will be invisible to the outside spectator. But Fergus O'Farrell's account of the collision between O'Connell and Henry Cooke is clear enough, as an adumbration of the present conflict; and new insights are shed on the old "clash of identities" by two complementary essays on Catholic attitudes to nature. Dorinda Outram takes issue with a male theology that keeps the nature-versus-science debate centred on the female body; while Michael Viney, in a lighter vein, attributes the Republic's environmental carelessness to the peasant's reluctance to romanticize the countryside. Extending these arguments into *realpolitik*, Hubert Butler makes an eloquent plea for Irish nuclear neutrality, pointing to the Nazi rocket-

factories as the real origin of the Star-Wars programme; and the international dimension is enlarged by Michael Kelly's survey of recent crises among French intellectuals - an amused account, which is perhaps not likely to amuse its subjects.

The quality of criticism is high, and combative. In a well-informed review of the *Collected Plays*, J. C. C. Mays accounts for Beckett's embarrassment over the success of *Waiting for Godot*. Douglas Dunn brings a harsh light to bear on the weaker elements of the new *Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, and Thomas Kinsella's Oxford equivalent is roundly condemned by Ciarán Carson, whose creative contribution to the issue is a densely Proustian memoir of West Belfast, somewhere between verse and prose. There are three untranslated Gaelic poems by Máire Mheicín Saor, and an atmospheric extract from the film-script of John Burt Foster's novel *Birchwood*; but the freshest literary nuggets are the nine poems by Martin Sorensen, in new translations by Paul Muldoon and Ted Hughes. Despite Muldoon's occasional lapse from the graceful ("Every-one's neck is chafed / by the newspaper whoe-er's behind him's reading"), their appeal lies as much in what the translators' choices reveal, as in the lyrical ironies of the original.

FIFTY YEARS ON

The TLS of June 26, 1937, carried a review of *William Telling's book The Pope in Politics: The Life and Work of Pope Pius XI from which the following extracts are taken:*

"It is perfectly easy," declares Mr. Telling, "for a British-born Catholic to distinguish between the two things, the religious influence of Rome and the political influence of Rome." His book is concerned entirely with the latter influence, and he is outspokenly critical of the way it is at present exercised. . . . [He] is fully aware that the moral judgment of the world was adverse to Italy's Abyssinian policy, and his own heart is with the Roman Catholics of the New World who 'sighed and sighed in vain' for some pronouncement after the atrocities of Addis Ababa that would compare with that made when a Pope or a St. Ambrose could force an Emperor to do penance on his knees for atrocities not half as bad." He is accordingly prepared to contemplate an organization of the Church very different from that which now obtains:

In fifty years' time the American world will lead the Catholic Church in numbers by a large majority. Will

the Americans be content to take their orders and pay their money always to an Italian, when there is no reason whatever, in the laws of the Church, why an Italian must be Pope? The more the Catholic Church becomes identified with the Fascist and totalitarian idea of Italy, of Austria and now of Franco's Spain, the more will the New World become restless. The hegemony of the Church is fast slipping away from Europe and it is no fantastic idea to imagine an American Pope spending half the year at the Vatican and the other half in the New World.

All Popes have autocratic powers, and Pius XI is a strong Pope. . . . Mr. Telling notes that it was because of his researches into the eighteenth-century Church in Poland that he was sent to Warsaw. His experiences there convinced him . . . of the incompatibility of Bolshevism with Christianity. Because Mussolini was the enemy of Bolshevism the Pope came to terms with him. Mr. Telling is by no means satisfied that the Vatican made a good bargain. The Papacy has heard itself claimed by Fascism as one of the glories of Italy, and its close association with the Duce has injured its reputation both among the world's democracies and in the mission fields.

Letters

F. R. Leavis

Sir, - No doubt Chris Baldick, in his review of *Valuation in Criticism and other essays* (June 12), knows perfectly well that F. R. Leavis never said that there were only four novelists worth reading - or even only four novelists in English. But no doubt he also knows that by suggesting as much he is helping to perpetuate a myth, thereby encouraging readers unfamiliar with Leavis's writings to believe Mr Baldick's impudent claim that he is now hardly worth anyone's attention. What Leavis actually said was:

It passes as fact (in spite of the printed evidence) that I pronounce Milton negligible, dismiss the "Romantic", and hold that, since Donne, there is no poet we need bother about except Hopkins and Eliot. The view, I suppose, will be as confidently attributed to me that, except Jane Austen, George Eliot, James and Conrad, there are no novelists in English worth reading. (*The Great Tradition*, p.1)

How right he was!

Nay is it true that "outside the pages of *Revaluation* and parts of *The Great Tradition* only a small proportion of his writings offers us critical elucidation of particular works". Quite apart from the numerous essays dealing with individual writers which are collected in *The Common Pursuit*, *Anna Karenina* and *other essays* and elsewhere, most of D. H. Lawrence: *Novelist*, much of *New Bearings* and *Thoughts, Words and Creativity*, the third (and longest) section of *The Living Principle* and the three chapters he contributed to *Dickens the Novelist*, all offer us just such elucidation. If Baldick does not know this, why was he thought qualified to write his review?

Whether Leavis's reverence for D. H. Lawrence's creative genius amounted to "hero-worship" is perhaps a matter of opinion, but he certainly did not "exempt [Lawrence] from critical scrutiny" - see, for instance, his scathing comments on *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in "The Orthodoxy of Enlightenment" (reprinted in *Anna Karenina*), or the adverse criticism of *The Plumed Serpent* in *Thought, Words and Creativity*. Nor did he "install" Lawrence "for what he could be said to stand for" rather than "for what he wrote". From 1950 until 1953 he published in *Scrutiny* several extended analyses of Lawrence's novels and tales, including *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, which in 1955 formed the core of his first full-length study of this writer. Always the emphasis was on Lawrence's greatness as an artist. Incidentally, Baldick's praise of Leavis's first essay on Lawrence, at the expense of the later, more deeply considered writings mentioned above, reminds me of Leavis's comment on the particular admiration David Garroet expressed for *The White Peacock*: "So, by way of paying one's tribute to James, one might say: 'Yes, tremendous! I particularly admire *The American*. Or, a greater genius lying in question: I particularly admire *Two Gentlemen of Verona*'" (from "Keynes, Lawrence and Cambridge", reprinted in *The Common Pursuit*).

I am aware, Sir, that the Leavises are considered hopelessly old-fashioned by most of the academics you call upon to write about them (they actually believed that some authors are better than others); but those of us who find their criticism more valuable than anything being written today will continue to be irritated by, and to protest against, reviews like that perpetrated by Mr Baldick, whose tone implies that he could of course do so much better than the Leavises if he really tried - if, indeed, he hasn't done so already.

M. B. KINCH,
56 Berryfield Road, Bradford-upon-Avon, Wiltshire.

Bernard Berenson

Sir, - May I rebut Francis Haskell's mischievous suggestion, in your issue of June 5, that I am among the "well-known art historians widely believed to have been close friends and admirers" of Bernard Berenson, who have been "distancing themselves from him"? The sentence to which he refers reads: "It is fifty years since I first lunched at 1 Tatton, not greatly liking Berenson; and met him again later in the summer at the Salzburg Festival, liking him even less." My friendship with Berenson, to which I owe an incalculable debt, opened in

1945 and continued till his death. I described him in a review in *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1960, later reprinted in book form, as "the standard bearer of a coherent set of values and the most sensitive precisian instrument that has ever been applied to the study of Italian art". Not only have I no reason to modify that judgement, but I would add that more than a quarter of a century later his achievement seems to me even more substantial than I thought it then.

JOHN POPE-HENNESSY,
28 Via de' Bardi, Florence.

'Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk'

Sir, - In his review of David Pountney's production of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (Commentary, June 5), Christopher Norris complains about "anti-Soviet bias" in the programme notes. This he finds in extracts culled from Shostakovich's "memoirs" and Robert Conquest's *The Great Terror*. He finds none however in the stage performance: it "effectively rebuts any simplified account of the music's political message".

Yet this production's central *caup de théâtre* (a grimly buffoonish effect) occurs when the massive set revolves (for the umpteenth time) to reveal the usual Pountney cast of thousands, all dressed in NKVD uniforms (under vivid scarlet cloaks - very subtle, this). At their centre is the local Chief of Police: a Joseph Stalin look-alike, no less. Does this not have all the virtues (and drawbacks) of extreme comic-book simplicity?

Nor is it at odds with the picture of Stalinist Russia presented in the programme except in so far as Katerina and Sergei are clearly guilty of murder when hauled off by these Keystone Chekists - unlike those countless millions of innocent Soviet citizens enslaved or slaughtered by Stalin's State 58.

Does Norris seriously believe that the authors he cites are motivated by ideological *parti pris*? Whatever Conquest's convictions as a journalist may be, as a historian he is scrupulous to a fault and conservative with a very small "c". Compare his sober account of the Terror with Solzhenitsyn's impassioned and rhetorical *Gulag Archipelago* (extracts from which do not feature in the programme). And does Volkov's "Shostakovich" merely ventriloquize Cold War propaganda? Is it not almost exclusively Stalin and the Stalinists against whom his animus is directed? (Though we are left in no doubt about Shostakovich's mistrust of the capitalist West.) Neither Marxism nor Communism features in Volkov's Index.

Pountney's *Lady Macbeth* is in no way definitive. But its one-dimensional anti-Stalinism is one of its major strengths: it fits both Volkov's portrait of Shostakovich, and the evidence of Stalin's genocidal crimes so painstakingly reassembled by Western historians such as Conquest.

KEVIN MAYNARD,
13 Doulton Mews, Lymington Road, London NW6.

Reprocessed Processing

Sir, - Geoffrey Sampson's statement in his review of *Parallel Distributed Processing*, edited by David Rumelhart and others (June 12) that PDP has "been sweeping the academic world during the past two years" will read rather oddly to those neurophysiologists and psychologists who were brought up on the ideas of Hebb, McCulloch, Pitts, Rosenblatt and others, which were first published in the 1940s and 50s, and have been teaching it to generations of medical students as received dogma. The fact is of course that it is now opinion. The fact is of course that the past twenty computer scientists, who for the past twenty years have been constrained by the need to model brain processes in terms of the only kinds of operation that their machines could perform - the serial application of decision rules - and have been curiously reluctant to look at how the neurons in the brain actually work. In these circumstances, it is a little galling to be told that "to continue teaching the subject in the orthodox style would be like keeping alchemy alive".

WILLIAM COOKSON,
Agenda, 5 Cranbourne Court, Albert Bridge Road, London SW11.

Intervention in Angola

Sir, - In your edition of May 22 Marcel Pinner asserts in his letter: "It was undoubtedly the Cubans who were there [in Angola] first." In 1975 I was covering southern Africa, including Angola, for the *Observer*, and I would like to set the record straight.

In August 1975 Zambia's President Kenneth Kaunda told a colleague and me that the UNITA leader, Jonas Savimbi, had told him some days earlier that he had made an agreement under which South African troops had occupied the southern 500 kilometres of Angola. The Zambian leader said he had told Savimbi that this was extremely unwise. This occupation was subsequently confirmed by the Portuguese authorities in Luanda.

From this 500-kilometre zone the South Africans began their drive towards Luanda in mid-October. The southern towns of Luango and Mocimboa fell in the South African column on October 27. The first Cuban military instructors, 450 of them, arrived in October, at least two months after the South African occupation of southern Angola. Some of them fought and died at a training camp just south of Benguela, almost 500 kilometres inside Angola, trying to check the South African northward thrust. It was only after this, on November 5, with Angola's independence six days away and the South Africans closing on Luanda, from the north as well as south, that Laviana committed its first combat troops to Angola.

There is one further important historical fact which is overlooked. Until midnight on November 10, 1975, when they withdrew, Angola was a Portuguese colony under Portuguese rule. Permission was obtained from the Portuguese authorities for the arrival of the Cuban instructors in October. No such permission was given for the South African occupation which preceded this or the invasion which followed.

DAVID MARTIN,
Box 5690, Harare, Zimbabwe.

Beveridge and Unemployment

Sir, - Commenting on my review of *War and Social Change*, T. Barna is correct to point out (Letters, June 12) that the text of the Beveridge Report when published in 1942 assumed average unemployment of between 8½ and 10 per cent in post-war Britain. Since the figure had not fallen below this between 1921 and 1940 that assumption was a reasonable one.

However, the important point surely is that by the time the Government White Paper *Social Insurance*, which accepted most of the Beveridge principles, was published in September 1944 the climate of ideas had changed. Four months earlier, in May 1944, another White Paper, *Employment Policy*, had argued that public expenditure be used to avoid cyclical unemployment, and government aid channelled to create new industries in decaying regions, as the Barlow Report had recommended as early as 1940.

Moreover, the ideas and influence of J. M. Keynes had cast their spell: at Bretton Woods in 1944 he was at the height of his powers. Beveridge himself had largely abandoned his opposition to Keynesianism, as José Harris has shown in her definitive *William Beveridge: A Biography*. Finally, it fell to the Labour government elected in 1945 to put these ideas into practice in a way for which it is rarely given full credit at a time when a Conservative government strove to rubbish the ideas of Beveridge and Keynes.

PATRICK RENSCHAW,
Department of History, University of Sheffield, Sheffield.

'Scripsi'

Sir, - Interesting that Duncan Wu should compare *Scripsi* (The Periodicals, June 12) with *Agenda*. It may interest your readers to know that our current issue contains a fifty-six-page *Scripsi* supplement; a special section compiled by the magazine's editors, presenting a spectrum of current Australian writing.

WILLIAM COOKSON,
Agenda, 5 Cranbourne Court, Albert Bridge Road, London SW11.

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Another time, another place

G. S. Smith provides a guide to current Russian poetry, and a sceptical view of the literary impact of *glasnost* within the Soviet Union

Welcome though it is, the widely reported galvanization of Soviet literary life in the past year threatens to divert attention from the real situation of Russian poetry at present. Not that the subject normally attracts a great deal of interest; there has to be an element of political scandal, as in the recent case of Irina Ratnshinskaya, in bring the subject to a wider public in the West. But no discussion can avoid the political dimension: politics determines the availability of Russian poetry to its primary audience.

Nothing has yet happened to change the fundamental fact that the Russian poetry that matters most is published in the West. Everybody knows that for almost twenty years the most important living Russian poet has been Joseph Brodsky. Only a tiny number of his poems have ever been published in the Soviet Union and Soviet poets and critics have long found themselves in the foolish position of having to pretend that no first-rank, generation-defining talent has emerged since the Second World War. Brodsky, who left the Soviet Union in 1972, demonstrated before anyone else that a writer brought up in the Soviet Union can flourish, creatively and in other ways, in exile. By 1980, when he turned forty, he had become the only Russian poet ever to attain a truly world reputation in his own lifetime. He is the first and so far the only major Russian poet to have assimilated Anglo-American modernism, which makes him an Russian to many tastes. Brodsky has set the standards by which other poets are judged, a situation that makes things difficult for those who do not resemble him. There are five other indisputably major talents besides him in the so-called third emigration (ie, those who came out in the 1970s and 80s): Dmitri Bobyshev, Natalya Gorbanevskaya (both born in 1936), Yuri Kublansky (1947), Lev Loseff (1937) and Aleksei Tsvetkov (1947).

Bobyshev, one of the first to emerge in Brodsky's remarkable Leningrad constellation, emigrated in 1979, with the Paris publication of the collection *Ziyariya* (Gapings) to herald him. His most impressive piece so far is the mighty — ninety-one ten-line sections — "Russian Terrets" (1977–81), begun in Leningrad and finished in Milwaukee, a confrontation in dialogue between the poet and a series of sibyls which are by turns admonitory, seductive and consolatory as they voice myths of the essence of Russia. The conclusion is a resolute act of defiance: "And if I never see once more / That wet-lumped spud field, hut, or puddled platform / so be it. I choose liberty. / To die a free man. Thus I speak." In "Stars and Stripes" (1983), another long poem, Bobyshev found some striking images in his first encounters with American geographical and social reality: the continent as a gigantic baseball glove, consumer-plagued Niagara as a curtain of falling

soft-drink bottles. More recently Bobyshev has tended to scale down; besides his staple mode, the lyrically disordered exploration of his religious belief and experience, he has produced some more typical poems, including a sarcastic meditation on the removal of Chaliapin's remains to Russia; his thoughts are entirely appropriate to the current textual exhumations in the Soviet Union. American poets have begun to translate him (and he has repaid the compliment); his grandiloquent, archizing, unabashedly emotional manner is hard to capture in another language, but with luck he will soon be discovered by English-speaking readers.

Natalya Gorbanevskaya has been based in Paris since 1976. Following on from her gallant contribution as an active political dissident during the late 1960s, she occupies one of the key ideological positions in the third emigration as executive secretary of the imposing quarterly *Continent*. She has ably translated a number of living East European poets for the journal though her own poetry rarely deals with the socio-political subject matter that tends to be theirs. Remarkably, given her pure lyricism, she avoids falling back into self-consciously fragile pre-Tsvetayeva "ladies' verse"; as a love poet her persona is vulnerable, yet still tough.

The last of the five to emigrate was Kublansky, who settled in West Germany in October 1982. Some of his very early work appeared in an underground anthology in the mid-1960s, but then he disappeared from sight for about ten years. His collection *The Last of the Sun* (1982) summed up his work before his emigration, and demonstrated a strong, fertile imagination and observant eye. His work has matured noticeably since then. He studies the French and German landscape, finds himself alienated, but does not wallow in nostalgia. Like Bobyshev, but less vociferously, Kublansky is an explicitly religious poet.

Lev Loseff, who teaches Russian literature at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, is unique among the five in that he only discovered himself as a serious poet in his late thirties, after emigrating from Leningrad ten years ago. His poems about the city surpass those of any poet of his generation (characteristically side-stepping, Brodsky wrote his most extensive work on the subject in English prose). Loseff has a dry sense of humour and a penchant for self-deprecation, very rare qualities among Russian poets, as well as a remarkable eye for detail and a crisp, allusive verse technique. In his collection *Chudesny desant* (The Miraculous Raid, 1985) he coldly denigrated Khodasevich's hard-won visions of the nihilist's chair that Georgy Ivanov inaugurated in Russian poetry.

The most productive of the five poets has

been Aleksei Tsvetkov, who now has three solid collections to his name. The latest of them, *Eden* (1985), continues the boisterous linguistic games he played in earlier work, and sometimes takes them to the edge of chaos, with vivid colloquialisms chasing sly puns; the book also features Tsvetkov's formal trademark, tightly patterned stanzas of unpunctuated lower-case words cemented by consonantal repetitions. But Tsvetkov ties the whole book together in a narrative web describing his lost adolescence in a movingly evoked Soviet provincial town, and with repeated attempts to decide whether he left his real self there, a self that can address the person now living in Washington, DC: "I am the former you your isonym / by grafting fitted on to a dead trunk". Although Tsvetkov must suspect that his style cannot usefully be translated, he has started the job himself; *Eden* closes with an English version of one of his own earlier lyrics.

All these poets have produced their best work since they left Russia. Alienation from the ruling culture of the old country while being surrounded by it, followed by geographical displacement into a cultural milieu that is also alien: out of this experience has come some very good poetry.

Behind these major poets stands a solid second rank. Naum Korzhavin (born 1925), whose poetic career began with a prison sentence under Stalin, is now a senior presence among the Russian poets outside Russia, still turning out his four-square, moralistic pieces. At the other extreme from Korzhavin is the ageing avant-garde, including another key ex-Leningrad figure, Konstantin Kuzminsky (born 1940), and the notorious Eduard Limonov (1943); they are busy proclaiming by word, graphic image and deed that the émigré establishment is as philistine as the Soviet one. The seven fat volumes so far published of Kuzminsky's *Blue Lagoon Anthology of Russian Poetry*, spiced throughout with the editor's calculated bad taste, have at last enabled us to get some idea of the full range and variety of post-war nonconformist Russian poetry.

The third emigration of Russian writers seems to care as little about its immediate predecessors in emigration as do the Soviets. Among these predecessors are three major poets: Igor Chinnov (born 1914), a fluent and polished septic; Ivan Elagin (1918), the best civic poet of his generation, which includes the vaunted Soviet front-line school; and his contemporary and fellow ex-Kievan Nikolai Morshen, who is preoccupied with paranoiac *Naturphilosophie*. These American citizens are happily still with us and writing. In his poems about how it feels to be "forgiven" and politely invited to contribute to the archives of the régime that murdered your father and robbed you of your birthright at the age of eighteen, Elagin has made some scathing comments relevant to what is now being done in Moscow with the legacy of his predecessors in emigration.

These writers chose emigration. There is also a phalanx of important poets that has been kept out, or kicked out, of Soviet literature, but has chosen to stay on in the country. It includes a strong Leningrad contingent, poet of widely diverse styles: Mikhail Eremin (born 1936), Vladimir Uflyand (1937), Oleg Okhapkin (1944), Viktor Krivulin (1945) and Elena Shvarts (1948). In Moscow there are Semen Lipkin (1913) and Inna Lisnynskaya (1924), expelled from the Writers' Union after the *Metropol* scandal of 1980, the important conceptual poet Gennadi Aigi (1934), German Plisetsky (1931), the resolute nonconformist Genrikh Sapgir (1928), Aleksandr Soprovov (1953) and others.

There is no need to belabour the point that these poets, and many lesser ones besides, are saying things, and in a language, that will remain publicly impermissible in the Soviet Union until the Party abandons its ideological monopoly of the media rather than authorizing controlled public argument. They constitute the live creative forces in Russian poetry now. Their names do not figure in the recent literary events in the Soviet Union, which so far have been mainly concerned with the dead.

Among these events, the work that has been mentioned most often in the West is by Anna Akhmatova. Her famous *Requiem* is a sequence of lyrics written during the period's deals with, the purge years between 1935 and 1940. Akhmatova's son Lev was re-arrested this time, partly as a hostage to extract his mother's co-operation with the authorities. Akhmatova set out to generalize her experience of loss, uncertainty and — above all — fear. The work was first published in Germany in 1963. It has been mentioned in the Soviet press in recent years, but the announcement of its forthcoming publication there was a surprise, because there was no peg to hang it on except for the fiftieth anniversary of its conception (the fiftieth anniversary of the events that gave rise to it has not been widely celebrated).

The father of Akhmatova's son was the poet Nikolai Gumilev, shot for counter-revolutionary activity in 1921. The centenary of Gumilev's birth in 1986, coinciding with the beginning of the Gorbachev reforms, has triggered the publication of selections from his poetry: plays, travel notes and letters. Contrary to some statements, this is not the first time Gumilev has been published in Russia since his death (his work appeared in a remarkable anthology in 1962, for example), but there has certainly been nothing comparable in volume and range. Gumilev's aggressive male idealism was an important (if unmentionable) model for the first generation of Soviet poets, but his work now seems mainly of historical interest. His exact contemporary was Vladislav Khodasevich, who emigrated in 1922 and died in Paris seventeen years later. The centenary of his birth has facilitated the appearance of his work in prose and verse after more than two decades of broken promises to the Soviet reader. Khodasevich's corrosive misanthropy had

to be kept from the Soviet public; that part of it that was directed against the new Soviet man and his masters still is.

Several other émigrés have been taken off the blacklist without the occasion of an anniversary. The most remarkable of them is Georgy Ivanov, the truest poet of the first emigration, who squeezed out his best work in the last twenty years of his life, when there was nothing left to believe. Born in 1894, a rising star before the Revolution, he died in Nice in 1958. A substantial batch of Ivanov's lyrics, undated but including some from the last period, appeared this year in the third issue of the formerly very orthodox journal *Znaniya*. Unlike all the other poets concerned in recent Soviet publications, Ivanov has never been published or discussed to the extent that he deserves. His bitter and almost unrelieved nihilism, something of which came through in the *Znaniya* selection, has been almost as unacceptable to émigrés and Western Slavists as it had hitherto been in the Soviet Union.

It should be emphasized that neither Gumilev nor Khodasevich, nor even Georgy Ivanov, were absolute unpersons before the Gorbachev reforms. Their work has been quoted and discussed in academic Soviet histories of literature for a number of years, but always to the accompaniment of ritual abuse

concerning their "mistakes" and "failure to understand" matters like the essentially liberating nature of the October Revolution. The comments accompanying recent publications soften this element. But there is never any expression of guilt, and no sense of surprise, much less outrage, that these vital elements of the poetic legacy have not been available to ordinary Soviet readers before. They have been covertly available to the élite, as are all scarce goods; there is a fashion now for publicly boasting of one's previous knowledge of works and writers formerly beyond the pale. In commentaries on the newly acceptable dead poets, we meet the familiar complacency of the Soviet insiders. There is nothing really new in the current technique and manner of rehabilitation. Under Brezhnev we saw it happen to unpersuaded victims of Stalin like Bulgakov, Mandelstam and Pilnyak, and to hapless returnees such as Tsvetaeva and the great critic D. S. Mirsky. But before Gorbachev a writer usually had to die inside the Soviet Union to stand a chance of rehabilitation. Now, the terminal émigrés, like Khodasevich, Nabokov and even Georgy Ivanov, can be redeemed, provided they have been dead long enough. It only has to be said in a preface that they regretted leaving the country and suffered appalling loss from chronic nostalgia (presumably in their

lunging to participate in Stalin's *perestroika*).

There have been other surprises, some concerning dead poets who didn't emigrate. Some Soviet poets who died in good odour have had their desk drawers raided. Among them is Boris Slutsky, who died last year, but his famous cycle that includes "I vanish reality", published in the West nearly thirty years ago, is still an underground text. Of comparable interest to Akhmatova's celebrated poem about the purges are the lyrics of another Leningrad poet, Olga Berggolts (1910–75), whose husband, the poet Boris Kornilov, unlike Akhmatova's son, never came back. Berggolts's poems on the subject, which were first published in the West a couple of years ago, appeared in the same issue of *Znaniya* as the Georgy Ivanov lyrics, and again, with no explanation except for the harshly eloquent dates. But they were followed by an impressively frank article about Berggolts's life and work by the eminent critic Vladimir Lukshin.

As an official Soviet poet, Berggolts was not nearly so eminent as Alexander Tvardovsky (1910–71) of whom Solzhenitsyn gives us a forgettable portrait in *The Oak and the Calf*. The long poem Tvardovsky struggled to finish in his dying years finally came out in the second issue of *Znaniya* this year. Soviet readers must be wondering what the limits of censorship and

posthumous revelation can be if a man in Tvardovsky's position — he was a member of the Central Committee — was an underground poet under Brezhnev. His poem dealing with the collectivization of agriculture, in which his parents were killed, has a title very resonant under present conditions. *By Right of Memory*.

All this is very welcome. Because of these publications, there has been some poetry worth reading in the Soviet journals in recent months. But there is still an enormous amount to be recovered before the Soviet reader can catch up with what has really been going on in the past thirty years. Hardly a single text has yet appeared in the Soviet Union that has not already been published outside the country. Recent Soviet commentaries give no recognition whatsoever to the heroic and thankless efforts of émigré Russians and Western Slavists to preserve the great legacy of Russian poetry of the first half of this century. In the past twenty years outside Russia, scholarly editions of the following ninety poets have been published or are in progress: Anna Akhmatova, Andrei Bely, Zinaida Gippius, Nikolai Gumilev, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Daniil Kharms, Vladimir Khodasevich, Nikolai Klyuev, Mikhail Kuzmin, Osip Mandelstam, Sofia Parnok, Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetaeva,

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Two poems by JOSEPH BRODSKY

Elegy

About a year has passed. I've returned to the place of battle,
to his birds that have learned their unfolding of wings from a subtle
lift of a surprised eyebrow, or perhaps from a razor blade
— wings, now the shade of early twilight, now of stale bad blood.

Now the place is abuzz with trading in your ankles' remnants, bronzes
of sun-burnt breastplates, dying laughter, bruises,
rumours of fresh reserves, memories of high treason,
laundered banners with imprints of the many who since have risen.

All is overgrown with people. A ruin's a rather stubborn
architectural style. And the heart's distinction from a pitch-black cavern
isn't that great; not great enough to fear
that we may collide again like blind eggs somewhere.

At sunrise, when one stares at one's face, I often
set out on foot to a monument cast in molten
lengthy bad dreams. And it says on the plinth "Commander.
in chief". But it reads, "in grief" or "in brief" or "in going under".

Ex Voto

To Jonathan Aaron

Something like a field in Hungary, but without
its innocence. Something like a long river, short
of its bridges. Above, an unutterable unlight
of eyes staining the view with hurt.

A posthumous vista where words belong
to their echo much more than to what one says.

An angel resembles in the clouds a blond
gone in an Auschwitz of sidewalk sales.
And a stone marks the ground where a sparrow sat
in shop windows; the palms of the glass foretell
to a mosquito challenging the façade
of a villa or, better yet, hotel —

his flat future. The farther one goes, the less
one is interested in the terrain.

An aimless iceberg resents bad press:
it suffers a meltdown, and forms a brain

Aleksandr Vvedensky and Maksimilian Voloshin. To this list could be added a large number of lesser poets, and also a substantial number of reprinted works that were originally published in Russia but have subsequently been censored. What parallel is there in world literary history for this situation?

The Soviet publication of formerly proscribed dead writers has not been unresisted. Accusations of necrophilia mark by some prominent writers were referred to in a speech of April 27 by Vladimir Karpov, First Secretary of the Board of the Union of Soviet Writers. Karpov was of the opinion that

it is essential to provide an accurate scholarly commentary to these works, to keep a sense of proportion, and not to let these publications overshadow our current literature, nor drive talented works about the present day and our pressing problems into second and third place. The fact of returning to literature works that were created by our predecessors and also the publication of things that have long lain in desk drawers is of itself entirely legitimate, and is also in the spirit of the times. But this doesn't mean at all that we should change our views on the literary process of these past 70 years and draw up a new list of its representatives. . . . Soviet literature has been formed, and has entered the culture of the twentieth century, it is the creation of all the peoples of the USSR, and new generations are being brought up on it. This is our pride and glory.

We have here, if we needed it, a very clear statement from a Gorbachev-appointed official that while he might be prepared to carry on publishing the works of the long dead, suitably sanitized, nothing substantial is going to change.

The real problem, though, is not necrophilia, but biophobia. In these publications of long-dead writers, and especially the émigrés, we are seeing an attempt by the generation now coming to power – men (not women, incidentally) born mainly in the early 1930s – to remodel the Soviet literary heritage according to its values, to assuage (one hopes) its feeling of guilt before Russian culture, to do something about the contempt in which Soviet culture and cultural policies are held abroad. These values are certainly preferable to those which have immediately preceded them. Poets like Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Voznesensky have spent a lot of time abroad, some of it with Russians in emigration, and know what has been going on. They are finally in a position to give the stay-at-homes who currently have executive power, like Vitaly Korotich (editor of *Ogoniok*) and Grigory Baklanov (*Znamya*), some sound advice. But the generation now officially represented in poetry by Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Voznesensky is still keeping quiet about a great many things. Potentially, the literary credibility – not to mention the ethical values – of this generation is threatened by the existence of a substantial contingent of poets who have not conformed, but instead have either emigrated or continued to work underground in the Soviet Union, and whose presence is a fundamental difference between the current thaw and the post-Stalin one.

The idea of *glasnost* was a crucial driving force behind the heroic dissidents of the 1960s; they postulated that by speaking out about things you could change them. Their anthem, and, as it turned out, their requiem was "Gold-miner's Waltz", by the gulag poet Alexander Galich. He compared the Soviet intelligentsia to prospectors searching for the gold of silence, which bought promotion, prosperity, power. It also entailed connivance in the crimes of the régime. "Many times, many ways we played silent parts. / And that silence meant yes, and not no." This message – speak out – has now become the official line. Galich was hounded into exile in 1974. A spate of articles about the history of gulag poetry has appeared in the Soviet press lately, with people who have been silent for twenty years falling over themselves to endorse the genre's patriarch Bulat Okudzhava, who previously had been grudgingly tolerated, and sublimely Vladimir Vysocky, who was studiously ignored in the media until after he died in 1980.

Galich's name is never mentioned, a falsification of literary history as gross as anything we have seen. When he is rehabilitated and his work is published and promoted inside the Soviet Union, there will really be something to report, because something fundamental will have changed.

Reading Milosz

Noises at night never struck us at all, but then you remarked that always at times when the railways are on the way down one starts hearing trains at night.

And now I can hear one, far away, – maybe he's hiding in the pillow.

I was reading a book by an old man.

I was reading a Polish writer.

The deserted expanse outside repeated

the expanse described in the book,

and I didn't notice myself getting lost

in his simple disquisition.

For some reason he led me far away

through the gloom of Plato's cave,

where by the light of a flame some soul

was drawing some faint animals.

And I read his disquisition to the end,

let the book fall from my hands,

and heard that the train still hadn't gone by,

its hammering sounded the same.

And it seemed to me that half the night, certainly

no less, I'd been on my journey,

but the goods train still hadn't managed

to pass through our little station.

I heard the rails ringing from over the river,

the sleepers, the bed of the bridge,

and somebody's hand squeezed my throat

then let it go again.

LEV LOSEFF

Living in the States

"Some are no more, and others far away." (Pushkin)

I'm living in the States from boredom,

pretending that I'm someone else,

pronouncing these unpleasant noises,

some in the throat, some through the nose,

some of them by my tongue extruded,

others locked in behind my teeth,

and nothing that I tell my students

makes any sense at all to me.

I could have been of worthy aspect,

with much to say that meant a lot,

partaking of a decent cognac,

Glazkov to share it, or Tselkov,

and as my arm would raise the snifter,

one slightly narrowed eye aloof,

I would recall with voice uplifted

what happened at our last sei-to,

how we dashed out when shades were falling

for vodka from the station bar.

Some are no more, and I'm past culling

(as somebody once said back there).

LEV LOSEFF

Directness

There is a directness

that's like something cranked.

It is hunchhacked inside itself.

Before it,

life is guiltlessly guilty

for not being a simple drawing.

Be afraid of making life straight,

without understanding

that by straightening you can bend.

Sometimes in history the straight line

between two points

is the longest route.

YEVGENY YEVUSHENKO

Song

Here's a song to sing next day,

when the sun is rising

on the trampled ashes of

love that wasn't really.

Here's a song to sing straight faced,

saying it's straightforward:

light yourself a private fire,

stamp it out in public.

Here's a song to sing so-so,

not worth trying to sweeten,

saying life's a trivial thing,

not a bed of ashes.

NATALYA GORBANEVSKAYA

O my poor Europe

O my poor, decrepit, lapsing-into-infancy

Europe, to whom will you leave

your last bar, last brothel,

and Charter of Liberties, in delirium

composed – wasn't it – by barons and earls

calming with wine their nerves

cracked in the excitations of battles,

when it's unknown who's right and who's beaten . . .

O my poor thing, this my graveside verse

is nothing but proof of my powerless

and endless love unto the end

for these final convulsions of your

face, etched with a net of slit

trenches, when the infantryman doesn't count,

but there's so much freedom for chill winds,

trucks and armoured cars.

NATALYA GORBANEVSKAYA

Hero negative

This is my hero negative

He's always here along with me

I drink a beer, – he drinks a beer

He lives in my apartment room

He goes to bed with girls I do

My dark-skinned member hangs from him

This is my hero negative.

And we may see his elegant back

Around the city of New York

On any one of those dark streets.

EDUARD LIMONOV

"Directness" is taken from Yevgeny Yevtushenko's *Almost at the End*, translated by this poet with Antonia W. Bova and Albert C. Todd, to be published by Marlon Boyan in August.

Other translations on this page are by G. S. Smith.

Lost in a strange city

Igor Pomerantsev

And if blood does not gush from the ears,
Life seems senseless, a pale shadow.

I am a bad poet from a distant country: I will call it the Western Empire. But do bad poets deserve to be honoured less than good ones? What makes bad poets worse than good ones, anyway? You are, let us say, Northerners and I do not belong among you. The poetry within which I work is closed to you. In my life and in my conversation I give the impression of being much more talented than I really am.

The key to my recognition in the North is otherness, my foreign birth and language. But let me lay my cards on the table. It happens to be the case that the North only accepts those Western (Eastern, Southern) poets who have had their finger nails pulled out at home. The vulnerability of finger nails, or their absence, is – like it or not – somehow connected with poetry. The possibility cannot be excluded that the reader, in order to justify his own creative passivity, will recognize talent only in those poets who have paid for their celebrity with their finger nails. But this means he, the reader, retains the possibility of developing some talent himself. Fate, pain, finger nails, like music, do not need translation. You believe them.

If you feel my remarks so far have been rambling and prefatory, you're right. I am, indeed, driving at something. I am, so to speak, casing pearls to manure the soil. Actually, I have a plan. Very soon I will contact the Chancellery of the Western Empire and request permission to return to my country. To do this I will accept any conditions they impose: make public appearances denouncing/praising, spend the rest of my days lecturing/nursery and infant school pupils on the dreadful lives children in the North have to lead and so on. While the Chancellery considers its decision, I will complete a cycle of poems to be called "Between Tortures". When I leave, this cycle will have been deposited with my wife. (An important detail: I am returning alone. My wife and son will be staying in the North.)

When I arrive home, I will refuse to do what I've promised, become involved in the opposition movement and, in consequence, end up behind bars. It is then that my poems come into play. From behind bars, barbed wire, minefields, surmounting dozens of barriers, my poems will appear to break through to the North to tell the grim truth of the despair and courage of a lonely hero. They'll give me seven years. If my wife publishes five or six poems a year, then I ought, probably, to prepare a cycle of forty poems. I've already finished a tenth of the cycle.

I hope that by the end of my first year in gaol I'll be the North's number one martyr, squeezing out people from the list who may have been inside for decades. Meanwhile the outrage my fellow exiles first felt when I returned will turn to euphoria when they hear about my arrest. In comparison with me, all of my exiled compatriots without exception will appear – in their own eyes at least – to be models of wisdom and perspicacity. They know, after all, that you could not believe a single word the Imperial Chancellery told you. Unlike that hysterical poetaster, they had not forgotten why they had been forced to leave the Motherland. They'd seen it coming, that idiot of a poet would be for the high jump, he'd catch it in the neck. Like they'd said: as soon as he steps off that plane he'll realize what he's done and curse the day he was born. And he did. Bloody idiot. But we are mature, generous, there's no hardness in our hearts. Poets should by rights be a little foolish. But he saw sense right away, didn't crack, and then he let them have it, both barrels, right between the eyes! And those poems! Couldn't string two words together before and now, when your poet laureate. And so on and so forth. There's always plenty of compliments to be paid to somebody stupider than yourself. And plenty will be.

How should the martyr's family, left behind in the North, behave? I compiled a list of instructions for my wife to follow to the letter. I quote some examples:

Do not express a preference for any grouping, sector party in the emigration. In my absence be a wife, figuratively speaking, to the entire community with quiet exception. Feed news to me about the Northern

media of all shades of opinion: from *The Eurasian Times* to *The Eurasian Sun*.

Always have them publish the same picture. Let it be imprinted on the public's memory in one version once and for all. As if I were a relative. As if they'd known me all their lives. As if the photograph had come from their own family album.

My wife should appear in public only in exceptional circumstances and always with her head covered. She should not smile, though neither should she display excessive grief. She should be photographed with members of the clergy.

When photographed for the Northern press, my son should be in his school uniform. Northerners will feel a boy in school uniform is one of them because their children wear the same uniform. And if the poet's little lad "looks just like ours", the poet is ours too – one of us.

Do not press for an audience with the Northern administration: in time they will consider it an honour to receive the wife of the poet hero. During election campaigns meet opposition politicians as well as members of the ruling guild's Council.

To prove that this is not a practical joke, I will now present the poems already written and comment briefly on them.



Two contestants at Moscow's bi-annual dog show; one of Tim Sebastian's photographs in his *I Spy in Russia* (127pp, Chatto and Windus, Paperback, £7.95, 0 701131586). Sebastian was BBC TV's Moscow correspondent before his expulsion in 1985 and he describes his book as a "collection of photographic impressions, a reflection of the small part of the Soviet Union I was able to see".

BLISS

Their sentences stretch
so long
you begin
to forget them,
and when at last
somebody
turns up outside the zone,
you feel this horror,
but soon,
hearing of his re-arrest
on the radio,
you breathe easy
and rejoice.

This poem, "Bliss", is schizophrenic: the author and the hero of the lyric are two very different people. The author is ironical, witty, almost cynical. The hero is faceless, stripped of all character traits. He is a typical man in the street, a conformist who is terrified of any change in the status quo. In Southern or Eastern poetry, neither of which has successfully grafted on to life's stem, a poem like this is hardly conceivable. In our Western poetry, though, it is quite at home. In the Western Empire the aestheticization of suffering has been brought to perfection. It should be seen as literary and aesthetic play, pure literary art. I fear that Northerners may be upset by agery. I fear that Northerners may be upset by this poem. Failing to detect its schizophrenic quality, they will judge its author in cynic and regard it as offensive to their finer feelings. I am not convinced this particular poem should be included in the cycle.

THE LAST FINGER NAIL

Do not feel ashamed!
Are you at blame
that you are left all last?
Your motherland is the little finger,
a mile,
a snail.

Still, you did see:
drops fall from thumb and first finger.
Heard:
cracking on the index,
crunching on the second.
Still,
no need for ink:
your brothers didn't strain
gave their all, to the last drop.
So, get writing,
while you're still out there!

In contrast to "Bliss", the hero and author of "The Last Finger Nail" are one person. As a rule the most popular works of literature are those in which the author, while not eschewing the banal altogether, steers away from it. By the banal I understand repetition: of experience, thoughts, words. The aesthetic expression of the banal is kitsch. For example, if the laws of humanity demand that a character in a story attempt suicide, the skilful author will make it an unusual method of suicide. Instead of, say, slashing his wrists, the character will tear his eyes out. "The Last Finger Nail", like any normal piece of writing, is predicated on the reader's possession of specific emotional skills.

person singular instead of the traditional lyrical "I" reduces the distance between reader and hero (the poet). Immediately a kind of social cabal, a sense of old school tie, blazer, shirtless, comes into play: the signal aimed at the reader (the classics, nineteenth century, knowledge of foreign languages, social inacceptability, the aristocratic) is received loud and clear. The subversive core of a classic is eroded by the passage of time. Furthermore, the classics are held up in unfavourable contrast to current literary forays, despite their direct kinship, despite the common genealogy of the classics and the avant-garde. At the same time, both products are the bastard offspring of their time. An element of risk or the illegitimate is always to be found in any worthwhile work of literature. The reader's defensive screens, his personal jammers "eliminate", "filter out" any information to the contrary. As a result the writings of a classic author who asserts that patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel or asks "why these gentlemen are so pleased with themselves . . . and on what grounds they comprise a select band, to which, in their opinion, other men should feel themselves flattered to be admitted . . . And is it not terrible, that they should consider others to be so low and so devoid of good sense?" become the inalienable property of patriots and aristocrats, become the cornerstones of rabid national or social extremism.

But let us return to the cycle.

DELIVERANCE

Lost
in a strange city.
Desperate for the toilet.
Scorched,
tried not to think.
Strained every muscle
to walk through the floor
marked with a W and a C
with decum. And . . .
the urinals
somewhere about face level,
like in a fair story about ogres.
Can't reach. And a voice from above:
"Prisoner! Up!
Interrogation time!"

The subject of exercising bodily functions strikes a chord in everybody, no matter what they feel about poetry. All of us have a story about being desperate and relieving ourselves in a rubbish bin, telephone receiver, pocket, lighter, ink-well. The victim's agonies are at once noble (as all agonies are) and base (as is anything connected with the nether regions). This duality is the basis of poetry. The language of love engages with something juicy, fecund, lush. A poem about a bursting bladder is especially apposite in the cycle "Between Tortures". The atmosphere of tension, of oppression before the storm breaks, is in our bodies. Literary dilettantes project their subject-matter on to nature (classics of Northern literature include *The Tempest*). The true poet never abandons physiology. The existential context of the "Between Tortures" cycle shines through the poem. The dream is escape. Physiological torment is hot pursuit, being hunted down. Capture is resolution, salvation. The gaoler brings deliverance. The poet is magnanimous in any and every circumstance; he sees in anything and everything subjects for poetry.

In conclusion, what is to be your role? How can each of you help me? Appeals and open letters addressed to the Western Imperial Chancellery are not as pointless as is often thought. Following the latest ominous turn of events in the Empire I have drafted an appeal. This is what it says:

Your Imperial Highness!
We, a group of concerned Northerners, beg you to save the acclaimed poet Y. His life is entirely in your hands. The Imperial Chancellery has, without your knowledge, launched a programme of reforms. As a result dangerous state criminals have been released from prisons and camps, and one camp barracks has even been entirely put on ice. A poet's dream – to return to the firm embrace of his Motherland – is under threat. We request, we demand that you annul these reforms! Denote the frozen Let the barracks and cells be filled once more with the buzz of voices, laughter, snoring. And just another bonus of administrative tinkering really has more important than the fate of a human being, the fate of a poet? We have faith in your wisdom and humanity, we have faith in progress, we have faith in you.
Signed:

This is an abridged version of a lecture given at the Middlesex Polytechnic earlier this year, translated by Frank Williams.

The Executioner's Block: a novel of the thaw

Katerina Clark

Since Gorbachev's accession to power, so much that was unexpected has happened in the Soviet Union that it is increasingly difficult to keep up with what is going on, much less know what it means. Like the Revolution itself, *perestroika* (restructuring) has become not just what Gorbachev intended for the economy or for the foily politics, but a much larger number of different events, all of which have their own significance and their own velocity of change. However, one text which may be used as a virtual Baedeker to at least the literary themes of the thaw is Chinghiz Aitmatov's as yet untranslated *Plakho* ("The Executioner's Block", 1986), a novel which has attracted more critical attention than any other in recent times. While far from the most outspoken, it is arguably the most representative text of the Gorbachev thaw in the sense that it both incorporates most of the relevant themes and has served frequently as occasion for their discussion among intellectuals.

Aitmatov, a Kirghiz author who has been in the Party since 1959, is a curious phenomenon, both a national institution who holds high offices, too numerous to list, and yet outspoken on some of the most delicate issues, such as Stalinist repression, a perennial theme in his writing even under Brezhnev when the subject was distinctly discouraged. Under Gorbachev, Aitmatov has assumed a Gorkyesque role as a sort of roving cultural ambassador. Last autumn, he set up the Issyk-Kul Forum for the discussion of world peace and other urgent issues. The forum is named after the lake resort in Aitmatov's native Kirghizia, where it held its inaugural meeting, after which delegates passing back through Moscow were taken to meet Gorbachev, whose address to them was one of his most liberal statements.

Aitmatov's writing, like that of many of his contemporaries, has tended towards parables. In the past, he has drawn on mythic traditions of his own Turkic peoples of Central Asia, although the way he uses them comes more from Russian and European literature and from Gabriel García Márquez and the new Latin American novel. In *The Executioner's Block*, however, he has turned to other sources, particularly Dostoevsky, Bulgakov and that naturalized Soviet writer, Jack London, while responding to the heightened expectations of a thaw by taking his narrative to a melodramatic extreme and lacing it with philosophical speculation about past and future.

The protagonist is a Russian Orthodox seminarian with the name of the Old Testament prophet Avdii. Avdii has been expelled from the seminary for heresy, but has not lost his faith. He believes no solution can be found for the human moral degradation he sees all around him until everyone repents and accepts God and takes up a common theme of the current thaw, one which is included in Tengiz Abuladze's film *Repentance*, that some form of religious or spiritual quest is today's most urgent task. After Avdii's expulsion, he becomes an investigative reporter for a regional Komsomol newspaper, and his adventures and misadventures become a pretext for a travelogue through the world of the Soviet drug dealer, together with a version of the exchange between Christ and Pontius Pilate, recalling the well-known version of that exchange in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*. In the end, Avdii dies at the hands of a non-Stalinist zealot in a composite of a lynching, a hanging at the stake and (predominantly) a crucifixion.

All this is hardly a case of "Buy meets tractor". But nor is Aitmatov advocating a Russian Orthodox revival, as many writers of the Russian national school have been covertly or openly doing since at least the late 1970s. Typically, he is unambiguous and cautious in treating his religious theme. Indeed much of his discussion of religion is found in Avdii's letters to his fiancée, and cannot therefore be taken to represent the narrator's point of view. Let alone Aitmatov's. Aitmatov himself is of course not Russian, and in his previous novel, *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* (1980, reviewed in the TLS, November 4, 1983), he used Muslim traditions of the Kazakhs in a similar role similar to the one which Christianity serves in this book. In both books, it is

clear that he advocates not the revival of a specific religion, but the search for a higher humanistic truth. Above all, he insists that true faith can have nothing to do with temporal powers or ecclesiastical hierarchies.

Obviously, though, there are other institutionalized belief systems, and Aitmatov's treatment of Christianity can be seen as a parable for the fate of Marxism-Leninism. Avdii's chief quarrel with Russian Orthodoxy is that its teachings have become "dogmatic postulates of an archaic belief system". Originally pitched to the masses, they have not kept pace with the populace's increasing sophistication, or with developments in human knowledge. The Church hides behind its own walls, unyielding, allowing no alternative to complete acceptance of its doctrines, and cut off from real life. Avdii's father was a parish priest, and the son was meant to follow in his footsteps, but finds he can't. (Aitmatov's own father was a leading Kirghiz Party member who was purged in 1937.)

The Executioner's Block is in three parts, at the end of the second of which Avdii dies. Now Aitmatov introduces an entirely new set of characters, all of them Kirghiz. The protagonist of Part Three is Boston, the head of a production unit on a sheep-breeding sovkhos, or state farm. As his name implies, Boston represents the element of American know-how which Lenin wished to see harnessed to socialism, believing it might lend Soviet Russia out of its backwardness into a viable Communist society. And indeed much of the story of Boston seems designed to serve as an object lesson in the wisdom of Gorbachev's economic reforms (which, of course, this simple shepherd had thought of long ago - *vox populi*). The glow imparted by this touching example of coincidence in thinking between the people and the new leadership is somewhat diminished when "the people" accuse Boston of being a kulak, and remind him that at another time he would be summarily shot. And in Aitmatov's treatment both of Boston and of Avdii he queries two fundamental assumptions of Soviet ideology which have been widely criticized during this thaw. The first is the notion that fulfilling the plan is sacrosanct; the second is the principle of dual management by Party and State.

The issue of professionalism versus "Party-mindedness", as it is treated in current Russian fiction, is part of the larger revival of interest in the plight of the intellectual in Soviet society. Indeed, in *The Executioner's Block* the meaning of the Christ/Pontius Pilate story and the story of Avdii can be seen as parallel tales about the arrest and repression of an intellectual. And the theme is also part of Aitmatov's treatment of two other current obsessions, the environment and the threat of nuclear war. Like most other issues, these are largely treated metaphorically, and especially in the story of a third set of characters: a highly idealized couple of noble-savage wolves, Akbara and Tanshchinar. Aitmatov reverses the Russian saying "Man is a Wolf to Man" by showing that while the couple, as carnivores, live by preying on lesser animals, they operate in a natural order that is threatened when man enters the hunt with a helicopter, air-to-ground communication and machine-gun (a clear metaphor for the arms race) or when with open-cut mining and burning he destroys the wolf's natural habitat.

This somewhat sentimentalized parable with its tragic dénouement reinforces a general theme, a theme commonly found in the current literary thaw: that we are back to square one. The main focus of interest during the thaw has been on the early 1920s - a point when the features that now define what is distinctively "Soviet" first became clear. So, for instance, the playwright Mikhail Shatrov has in several recent works given a place on the stage to political impersonations of the early 1920s, such as Birkharin and Trotsky, treating them as something more than mere caricatures. And other writers have been interested in similar acts of rehabilitation, for example, of authors who emigrated in the early years after the Revolution (or in the case of one, Gumilev, were shot for alleged anti-Soviet conspiracy). The list includes Khodasevich, Nabokov, Merezhkovsky and Remizov, and also some banned texts such as E. Zamyatin's dystopian novel *We* (1920) and Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*. An element of retrospection is endemic to

all thaws. One of the periodicals currently favoured by the intelligentsia, the revamped *Ogonyok* (in which many of these writers have already been published), formerly a magazine for the masses, is now largely given over to history. One of the guiding forces behind the magazine, D. S. Likhachev, is an expert on medieval Russian literature who was exiled in the 1920s for his role in underground circles for the study of Russian Orthodoxy.

Most of the leading figures in current Soviet literature, as they face square one anew, seem to want to unite their literature again. But of course even before the emigrations and expulsions of 1921-2, the intelligentsia was never really united. The main split in the early years after the Revolution was arguably not so much between those who supported the Revolution and those who emigrated, as between an iconoclastic avant-garde representing an international movement (and who largely supported the Bolsheviks), and conservative retrospectionists and *Kulturnaers* (who were rarely pro-Bolshevik, but with whose cultural tastes the Bolsheviks largely sympathized). Although during the current thaw some writers have called for the rehabilitation of figures from the early Soviet avant-garde, the main impetus so far has been to publish their antagonists.

In the early 1920s, such figures, while not usually anti-Western, joined with their Bolshe-

vik patrons in calling for a highly selective appropriation of Western culture, usually including only highbrow art. Their sentiments on this issue coincide with those which predominate in the Soviet Union today among both the Party leadership and the majority of writers. Most of them (if not rabidly chauvinist) sing the praises of the great cultural traditions of Europe with which Soviet culture is, in their view, to be identified. At the same time, they exorcise American popular mass culture. Such prejudices hinder Soviet literature from being radically innovative. The radical element in Western popular culture has been suppressed in the Soviet Union since the very first days of the Revolution. But it was resisted above all by the intellectuals themselves (including many of those who emigrated). Much more rock music is now permitted than before, but detached from the turbulent context which gave it birth in the West.

Popular culture, like postmodernism - also weakly represented in Soviet Russia - raises problems about the claims of high art to authority. But in this thaw, questions about authority itself are dispensed with in the search for particular models of authority. As *The Executioner's Block* makes clear, going back to square one means looking for a way not to subvert authority as such, but rather to find other grounds for it.

Refusing to grow wise

Sally Laird

TAT'YANA TOLSTAYA
"Na zolotoni kryl' tse idell... ' ('We Sat on the Golden Porch...')
190pp. Moscow: Molodaya Gvardia

In Russia, more strongly than elsewhere, poetry and prose still vie with each other for dominance of the literary scene, and their respective terms in power have been quite clearly defined. In the 1980s, poetry seems once more to have won among the younger generation of Soviet writers, particularly among those who have hovered on - or remained outside - the borders of "official" literature. Perhaps in the political context of the late 1970, poetry more readily presented itself as an escape route to air; at all events, there is at present no movement in prose as well defined, or as theoretically conscious, as those that have emerged over the last decade among the younger poets. But some strong individual voices have lately surfaced on the prose pages of the literary journals. Among the most interesting is that of Tat'yana Tolstaya (granddaughter of Aleksandr Tolstoy) whose first collection of stories - gathered from the journals *Avantura*, *Neva*, *Novy Mir* and *Oktyabr* - was published this year by Molodaya Gvardia.

In life itself, prose almost invariably triumphs over poetry: romance is crushed, hopes die, ambitions founder. All Tolstaya's stories are variations on this theme; life's only plot, after all, is to make us grow old, and disillusionment is part of that process. But many of Tolstaya's heroes resist it, refusing to grow wise, or to consign the poetry of their souls to illusion. Tolstaya, briskly narrating their journeys to disappointment, appears to side with fate in mocking her heroes' dreams. Yet her own language betrays a different view; its poetry and magic take revenge on her heroes' behalf, and mock the reality that would destroy them.

It is the child's *askazka*, or fairy-tale, that sets the tempo of her narratives and haunts their rhythm and intonation: "That's how it is, thought Simionov with heavy heart, and on his way home, over bridges, through garden, and over train lines, he thought - that's how it is. And it is with the ruthless gaiety of a child rather than an adult's ironic wisdom that Tolstaya deflates her own rhapsodic passages:

High above his head the ceiling swam, and higher still the girlet, the trunks with the good coats sleeping in their mothballs, and higher yet the left with its pitchforks, old journals, and wisps of hay - and there was the roof, the hunched chimney, the weather-vane, the moon - and through the garden, through the garden, they swam and flew, rocking, carrying Uncle Pasha and the land of his spent youth, to the land of hopes that were faded away - and then the chilly Veronika Vikentievna, heavy and white, would return to crush

his small, warm feet.

In this, the title story, as in many others, it is the man who dreams and the woman who does the crushing. If men, on the whole, hold on to their poetry longer, it is partly through a happy incompetence in the world of things. Preferring, if possible, not to acquaint themselves with "the birthplace of bast and brooms", or "the grievously short life of sour cream", they are better able to linger in the child's phenomenal world, where the origin of a thing, its function and destination, play no part in its identity. In such a world, creatures and objects alike enjoy a right to animation: gardens "wave handkerchieves", cheeses "snooze" in the larder. In women, too often, the tenderness of this vision is early sacrificed to a knowledge of cause and effect; and transferring this knowledge from the realm of things to human relations, they are apt to start plotting and laying strategies.

If men fail to understand how their wives come to be there, women surely know how this occurs: they lay bait with slippers, encourage men's shirts to settle on their shelves, and learn to look engagingly intellectual when eating profiteroles. Alas, however, such strategists tend to fall victim to their own plots, for men persist in believing that the plot must somehow be more interesting than this. Just as they are about to be "stuffed by the tea cosy" or stabbed by the action of knife and fork, their "free lonely souls" rise up from the table-cloth and "slither, snake-like, out through the napkin ring".

In pursuit of what? The hero of "Okkervil river" is in love with the voice on a record, and has invented a home for her at the end of his tramline; the hero of "Circle" traces his destiny through the telephone number stamped on laundered pillow slips, and glimpses its outcome in a face at the marketplace. "Hearts clenched in hope", they seek exits to higher realms, to something beyond "trams, books, processed cheese... and all the perishable things of this earth"; their mistake is only to believe that the answer can be found through literal doorways, or in faces as ordinary as theirs. This is what leads to their inevitable demise. Tolstaya's prose is sensuous and warm as it rises on the pulse of her heroes' hopes; but when the time comes, romance can be disposed of in a single sentence: "Isolda wasn't there any more."

Some Soviet critics have labelled Tolstaya "unfeeling" and "cold"; they find her child-like mirth unkind. But perhaps her real offence is in suggesting that life itself is unkind - at any rate at the level of existence (*byt*) that has been the habitation of much Soviet prose. If life itself fails to provide a good plot, perhaps writers or their heroes - are entitled to invent a better one; or at least to describe their stories in language borrowed from more magical realms.

After Marengo

Anne Duchêne

JEANETTE WINTERSON
The Passion
160pp. Bloomsbury. £10.95.
04135 00347

"I'm telling you stories. Trust me" is one leit-motif in Jeanette Winterson's new novel - her third since the Whitbread Prize in 1985 and the laborious *Iskrines of Boating for Beginners* last year. Now, she quite overwhelms talk of "promise" with a book of great imaginative audacity and assurance.

The setting itself is a challenge: the Grands Amées after 1805, and a splendidly dark, brooding backcloth of Venice at the same period. There are two narrators. Villanelle is a red-haired Venetian girl who has webbed feet, like her boatman father, and has lost her heart

-literally - to an older woman. The other and principal narrator, Henri, is a young French peasant, haphazardly educated and ambitious, who becomes personal chicken-cook (after Marengo, this is) to the Emperor. One of his army comrades is a defrocked Irish priest whose left eye can see for miles; employed as a lookout at Boulogne, he reports the weevils in the British troops' bread - "Don't believe that one", adds Henri. It is the priest who first talks of trusting the story-teller.

The two meet in burning Moscow and retreat privately, disenchanted, back to Italy. In Venice, Henri steals back Villanelle's heart, found pumping away in a jar in her lover's wardrobe. So Villanelle swallows it, and has her heart again. (She does not give it to Henri, who loves her more than he loved Napoleon.) These fairy-tale elements need cause no anxiety, because they are beautifully embedded in the story.

The "passion" promised in the title is hard to isolate in a book written wholly with passionate enjoyment and control. Certainly, conventional sexual passion prickles in Villanelle's love-affair; but relatively briefly. Henri's devotion demands a fuller definition. Napoleon, of course, has a passion for greatness; and Henri's infatuation only dwindles as he learns its cost. Even Josephine makes some delicious incidental appearances - a lovely, elegant, wronged creature with a saving passion for horticulture.

All this is too coarsely schematic, though. We are repeatedly told, in another leit-motif, that "somewhere between fear and sex passion is"; but also, almost as often, that "religion lies between fear and sex". This correspondence is not developed. It is noticeable that the prose, which is in general buoyant and immediate and easy (Napoleon contemplating invasion, "scanning the seas like an ordinary man checks his rain-barrel") turns cloudy only when the

talk is of "passion". One wouldn't want to read much, for instance, in the mode of the younger Henri's thoughts on it: "I can't be a priest because although my heart is as loud as hers I can pretend no answering riot. I have shouted to God and the Virgin, but they have not shouted back and I'm not interested in the still small voice. Surely a god can meet passion with passion?"

A story about history and hero-worship, the plight of women, the pains of soldiering, the violence of youth, and about the sadness of the unfulfillable condition of humanity - which ever thread one chooses to pull out, it comes from a richly tangled skein of enquiry and assertion, which only falters at this one point, and is elsewhere embodied in brilliantly physical (and funny) detail. The author is still not thirty years old. It looks as if we shall very rapidly come to trust her when she tells us stories.

After this the action, seen increasingly through Lucky's baffled eyes, mingles force with fable. Recruited as a guerrilla-fighter, he is flown to East Germany for training, fails, returns and, almost by accident, achieves the old ambition of the township youths, becoming Public Enemy Number One when a bomb he has planted blows off his own leg and kills two policemen. Impressed, his former mockers attend his trial and wave a pair of ballet shoes as a token of solidarity which comes to a climax when the bemused Lucky, stumbling on wisdom like a blind deer, tells the court, "I know that a small bird can break a big egg. An ostrich can speak with the voice of a lion. And one day we will all dance." He is sentenced to hang but doesn't realize this. A victim turned visionary, he is responsible for disturbances in the township where "young men were to be seen dancing in the streets".

Airborne by the coherence of its imagery, this exhilarating fable is, and is about, a triumph of the imagination over an obdurate and intolerable status quo. Zoë Wicomb's connected stories are also set in South Africa. They are about Frieda, a Coloured girl who is one of the clever few that manage to better themselves by getting an education. Encouraged by an ambitious father, she goes away to college, straightens her hair, puts up with loneliness, studies the map of Wessex and the trials of Hardy's Tess and learns to graft herself on to an alien culture. Later, visiting her relations, she is made to feel guilty by their innocent anxieties on her behalf and by their pride in her, which is spiced with bewilderment at her urge to move psychologically and geographically further and further away: an old story but interesting to encounter in a new setting. Strikingly, the writing gets progressively better, so that development in content is mirrored by the form.

New from Princeton

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"Grace Fong's marvellous study combines an in-depth scrutiny of an individual poet with an enlightening account of literary history. The book is extremely well organized, thought out, and researched, and the writing is of such lucidity and effortless elegance that its reading affords constant pleasure."
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Oxford blues

Jonathan Burnham

ALAN JUDG
The Noonday Devil
200pp. Hutchinson. £9.95.
009 1681802

Alan Judg's new novel, his third, examines the nature of accide, the "noonday devil" of spiritual indifference. Robert Stevens, the story's anti-hero, is an Oxford undergraduate in his final year. As public and private events in his narrative gather momentum and move towards resolution, Robert - on an inverse curve, as it were - loses his capacity for feeling, and undergoes a death of the heart. The force which destroys Robert is portrayed carefully. Accide is dangerous because of the state of moral passivity it produces in its victims. The College Chaplain explains this to Robert during a theology tutorial: "Evil is not interesting. It's pervasive, undramatic, shabby, real. A condition of life, unnoticed, unremarked. It's most common manifestation is indifference. That is the deepest and most lasting cruelty."

The Noonday Devil traces the consequences of this evil through an idyllic summer term at Oxford. The problems begin here, for, while the moral premises behind the novel is serious, the context is somehow not. Oxford life is presented, as in so many other twentieth-century novels, as something ratified and paradisaical. Robert's resistance to the spell comes to indicate his absolute indifference to anything of value. And Judg is too strenuous in his efforts to convey Oxford's charm. Parts of the text

begin to resemble a tourist guidebook as he describes the Oxford customs and institutions - May Morning at Magdalen, for example - which leave Robert cold.

By Oxford standards, by any standards perhaps, Robert's life is significant and busy: he directs a production of *The Changeling*; he prepares for finals; he learns that Anne, the girl he once loved, now married to a don, is bearing his child. He drinks, discusses politics, wrestles with the nature of sin, and makes love to Gina, the actress playing Beatrice. The plot's development is framed on one side by the tension of the peace talks at Geneva, and on the other by the tension of approaching finals. The issues are large ones - religion, nuclear war, sex - but Robert remains remote.

Judg's aim is clear: the juxtaposition of passion, in a number of forms, with indifference. However, the parts of the novel fail to add up. Robert's spiritual vacuum has to be established by default, through contrasts and negative factors; as a result it is lost among the details. The frivolity of Oxford undergraduate life establishes another barrier - how is Robert actually expected to respond? There is too much left out of the story, and the level of thought remains superficial, indifferent.

The talent of accide spreads itself through the novel, and infects the author, who adopts a neutral attitude towards his characters. The prose is deadpan. Cool impersonality of this kind is acceptable when a story carries its own resonance, but the structure of *The Noonday Devil* appears schematic and lifeless in itself. For this reason, the tragic ending fails to move, and the reader is left - like Robert - not really caring very much.

Heading west

Antony Beevor

MONA SIMPSON
Anywhere But Here
Jb6pp. Bloomsbury. £10.95.
0747510177

Anywhere But Here is a rare and deceptive book. At first it appears the sort of Great American Bildungsroman attempted by Lisa Alther in *Kinfolk*, on the theme of contemporary woman studying her roots and experience. But to put Mona Simpson's novel in that category would diminish its achievement and underestimate its scope. Her writing betrays none of the egocentricity which marks other fictional accounts of the "Me Decade". On the contrary, it is full of remarkable observation of people; and the most commonplace events are re-created in an utterly compelling way. Playing on the memory of tastes, smells and sounds as much as sight, it is an outstanding example of what might be called the hyper-realist school. But most effective of all, the juxtaposition of first-hand accounts – given by four women from three generations – cleverly illuminates the paradoxes of American myths and values.

The novel opens in the 1960s with twelve-year-old Ann and her feckless, self-deluding mother, Adele, on the road from Ily City, Wisconsin, to Beverly Hills – from Middle America to the Land of Opportunity. Ann is leaving behind her grandmother Lillian (born perhaps a little too symbolically in 1900) and her aunt Carol, a child of the Depression. While Carol became a thrifty, solid housewife, Adele, brought up during the boom economy of the war, was spoiled. More attractive and better educated than her older sister, she has come to believe that the world (the world of men) owes her a living. But she also believes that only the right brand-names, with the right car and the right clothes, will convince people that "you are somebody" and enable you to hook a rich husband. In other words, if you don't flaunt it, you won't get it.

Because she is so self-absorbed, she cannot imagine that she is her own worst enemy. And yet she manages to cling to an optimism that would be comic if it were not so pathetic. "I know it will all come right. I just know it!" she keeps telling her daughter and herself. And to reaffirm her faith in adversity she remembers everyone back home as gross, like Carol's husband Jimmy, or unsophisticated, like her poor meal-ticket of an ex-husband, whose charge

card they are using. Adele does not even divide the world into winners, plodders and losers. In her view the last two are synonymous.

The gradations between old and new, fixed and unsettled, Mid-West and California, are subtly drawn. Those monotonous yet reassuring relationships which the grandparents had known in their small community are weakened after the war by industrialization, television and travel. Home-made rhubarb pie is virtually a thing of the past; it's easier to drop by a Red Owl supermarket or Bob's Big Boy hamburger bar. The glitter of celebrity-cult television inspires a vague and restless yearning for something different – to be a somebody.

There are, of course, different degrees of addiction to escapism. Jimmy is perfectly content with the occasional razzmatazz of sales conventions, and Carol with memories. But Adele starts to mulline on wishful thinking as soon as she goes away to college. On a trip abroad she marries Ann's father, a handsome Egyptian, whom she believes to be fabulously rich. In fact he just wants to get into the United States, and once there, he runs up bills which her family has to pay. In Las Vegas he gambles

Pragmatical-pastoral

Jay Parini

WENDELL BERRY
The Wild Birds: Six stories of the Port William Membership
146pp. San Francisco: North Point; distributed in the UK by Airlift. £8.95.
0865172165

As an essayist, Wendell Berry is almost without equal in contemporary America: his fierce jeremiads decry the growth of "agribusiness" and the decline of the small farm while celebrating the virtues of "family work" and community. He has studied alternative ways of farming and living in the highlands of Peru, the deserts of Arizona, the Amish country of Pennsylvania and, most vividly, the Kentucky region where he grew up and still farms. He brings the same concerns to his poetry and fiction, both of which continue to grow alongside the essays, like parallel root crops tended simultaneously by an astonishingly gifted writer-farmer.

Like Faulkner, Berry returns repeatedly to the same fictional region, which he calls Port William, whose "membership" is the subject of

away the money they had saved to take their daughter Ann to Disneyland.

Adele can never spot a fellow opportunist and is always taken in; but she refuses to be downhearted. "I'll catch another father for you," she keeps telling her daughter, "you just wait." At times – particularly during Adele's pursuit of the orthodontist, Dr Spritzer – one or two of the characters teeter on the brink of stereotype, but Simpson never seems to lose her nerve, and the portrayal of Adele's relationship with her daughter, which provides the book's backbone, is flawless.

Anywhere But Here is not a moral tale but a clear-eyed story of changing mores. The rootlessness of the 1930s was born of sheer necessity. The Okies and migrants depicted by Steinbeck dreamed above all of a little frame house and a couple of acres to call their own. But Adele's life of bounced cheques and midnight flights comes with her justification for buying the white Lincoln Continental: "this way we won't have the house but we'll have a car to let people know who we are a little". Carol and the grandmother are left behind in the gradually abandoned heart of America.

these new short stories. As one character puts it, "The way we are, we are members of each other. All of us. Everything." His three novels – *Nathan Coulter*, *The Memory of Old Jack*, and *A Place on Earth* – trace the delicate interconnections among this "membership" through the Depression up to the 1950s. In *The Wild Birds*, he follows the reactions of Wheeler Catlett, a small-town lawyer, to critical moments in his life from early manhood to late middle age. These are stories of maturation, with Wheeler continually being thrown up against difficult family and community concerns. As Berry says in the title story,

A more compliant, less idealistic man than Wheeler might have been happier here than he has been, for this has been a place necessarily where people have revealed their greed, arrogance, meanness, cowardice, and some stupidity. And yet, though he has known these things, Wheeler has not believed in them. In loyalty to his clients, or to their Maker, in whose image he has supposed them made, he has believed in their generosity, goodness, courage, and intelligence.

What unifies these stories is the familiar Berry voice: somewhat stern, moral (even moralistic), often lyrical. This is pastoral writing in that Berry writes from the vantage-point of a sophisticated literary man among people whose sophistication is non-literary. He can verbalize their experience, and his own, in ways alien to them. Farm work is hard for Wendell Berry, of course; but it is also a satisfying prelude to language, which provides a pleasant, aesthetic aftertaste. As ever, Berry is able to translate a particular landscape and experience into a language unmistakably his own. Whether writing about Wheeler's affectionate relations with an alcoholic uncle, his discovery of sex, or the farmers and their ways of being in the world, he makes one shiver with the sense of what we have lost.

Imprecise intertwinings

Jane O'Grady

JANE RULE
This Is Not Far From You
289pp. Pandora. Paperback, £3.95.
0863581862

Despite the first sentence – "This is not a letter" – and the last, which forms its disclaiming title, this novel is a long outpouring addressed by a woman (Kate) to her beloved who has just become a nun, recounting their intertwined lives up to this point. Although she has been in love with Esther since their Californian college days, Kate has always felt obliged to protect her from a lesbian relationship. Why is not quite clear. Having rejected Christianity, Kate is untroubled by her lesbianism, and Esther, who eventually starts having disastrous extramarital affairs with men, only loses by her friend's sacrifice. The perpetually postponed consummation serves as a plot device which

SDI=IUD

Lesley Chamberlain

D. M. THOMAS
Summit
160pp. Gollancz. £9.95.
0575040688

According to D. M. Thomas, *Summit* is an adult fairy tale, designed to be a self-contained "farfetched or satirical coda" to his "serious" trilogy, *Ararat* (1983), *Swallow* (1984) and *Sphinx* (1986). Gone are the endless "literary" frameworks, and the result is an easier, occasionally funnier read. Thomas is still preoccupied with the East-West divide as it affects the sordid personages he conjures up, but here we've moved away from lustful, self-indulgent poets and aggrieved left-wing journalists to meet a high-level foursome one January in Geneva. President O'Reilly and his glamorous wife Wanda star opposite Comrade General Secretary Grobichov and a lady-friend, who is sometimes his *babushka* mother-in-law and sometimes a blonde young stunner who easily steals a march on Wanda. The summit, which shuts out the press and makes progress on a walk in the woods, turns into an occasion for sylvan wife-swapping.

Summit meetings which produce nothing, after enormous effort and with great ceremony, are easy targets for satire, of course, as are befuddled Presidents entrusted with serious tasks. After Thomas has introduced the analogy between the interuterine coil and the strategic defence initiative, he predictably has O'Reilly muddling them up, so that he is unsure what it is he is offering Moscow; his lines, though, remain plausibly the same (we don't know yet quite how they work, but it's only a matter of time before we find out). Bedroom farces, however, depend on taboos and on making someone blush. So, talk of IUDs causes the women to come over all modest, while the men look vague and talk moral. The message seems to be about how delicate arms talks may flip over into obscenity.

The summit ends in the same confusion in which it began. O'Reilly has offered the Russians California if they will only buy a few million IUDs, and Grobichov has proposed a fake joint project to populate space with the resurrected dead of all time. The world leaders part on the friendliest terms; O'Reilly even has a Lawrentian daydream about wrestling with Grobichov in that cabin in the woods, in front of the fire. In the end, Grobichov turns down the offer of the sunshine state after he hears of the plague that afflicts it. What a cunning ruse to annihilate the Reds!

What stops me recommending *Summit* as suitable for willing away a drowsy flight home (there is a suggestion on page one that this is what it is intended for) is that all four parts of the quartet are dedicated to Pushkin. Is there a more intimate connection between them than the Cold War theme and the opportunity for Russian name and theme-dropping? It's hard to guess that what they share is the surface wordplay out of which Thomas builds his material.

to build the meandering lives of the four main characters (who also include Ramona, a college friend; and Andrew, who loves all of them and eventually marries Ramona); but if never gets its mawkish pay-off.

Kate's exasperated adoration of the intense, childishly egotistic Esther is convincingly portrayed, as is Esther's half-awareness of Kate's real feelings, and there are occasional sharp insights. But much of this writing is imprecise, or has the portentously treaded cadence of the title; and the author's attempts to counteract this sentimentality with tentative coarseness from the narrator ("I had to censor a sudden objectivity") are transparent rather than successful. The almost unanimous perceptions of people and art (Esther is a sculptor) reveal the characters' insubstantiality rather than an interesting or cohesive authorial view. Although this novel avoids the proselytizing or stereotyping customary to lesbian fiction, the most the reader can expect from it is old ideas artfully

Trials of a king

George Cawkwell

PAUL CARTLEDGE
Agasilaos and the Crisis of Sparta
508pp. Duckworth. £39.50.
0715620827

Xenophon, who knew Agasilaos well, thought him "thoroughly good" and commended him not only for his powers of endurance and for his valour but also for his judgment; he was god-fearing, just, moderate and self-controlled and "blameless". Paul Cartledge sees him as calculating, brutal and above all lacking in judgment, and has written an uncommonly heavy book to make clear that Agasilaos' policies led inevitably to Sparta's ruin: professions of hostility to Persia were mere window-dressing; the mainspring of his actions was his "appressive, decisive, and ultimately disastrous" antipathy to Thebes; he utterly failed to realize that he was placing "an intolerable burden on the shoulders of a state that was internally weak" due to the debilitating effects of the class struggle.

It will come as no surprise to the author that I think he is as wrong-headed in most of this as he believes me to be. But before stating the main points of disagreement, it must be affirmed that the book is a repository of learning about Sparta and Spartan institutions that will be keenly studied by those professionally concerned with the first four decades of the fourth century BC, and indeed Greek history generally. Whether non-specialist readers will

take to it as avidly, one may doubt. The book has its *longueurs*. The narrative chapters, with which Cartledge suggests non-specialists might profitably begin, will, I fear, make them think these four decades are just a tedious mess. With different organization the book could have been to the general profit much shorter.

Cartledge's view of Agasilaos is what off it is thought but never so amply expressed, and it is rather than he who is in the dock. The main heads of disagreement are these.

First, he seems greatly to exaggerate the power and influence of Agasilaos in the Spartan state, sometimes to a comic degree. Agasilaos is presented as arranging the pederastic affairs of young Spartans to his political advantage, for which not a scrap of evidence can be adduced. Xenophon said that Agasilaos mourned the death of an opponent, the young king Agesipolis, whose society he had much enjoyed. Cartledge comments that if Agasilaos was genuinely grieved, "this was because he could not have hoped for a more complainant and malleable partner in crime". Thus even foes are pawns. No doubt Agasilaos was gifted at winning friends and influencing people (hence in part the devotion of Xenophon), but he certainly had his critics and opponents, whose power and influence are not to be belittled. A crucial case is Antalcidas. Cartledge, who draws freely enough on Plutarch's *Life*, rejects the explicit statement that Antalcidas was an opponent, and so makes Antalcidas' policies those of Agasilaos, to my mind a fundamental error: for when the former is prominent, the latter is unemployed. But there

were other opponents too, and Spartan policy varied, often to the dissatisfaction of Agasilaos. Cartledge makes him too much responsible.

Second, the Panhellenism of Agasilaos, in which he was at one with Xenophon, is dismissed as a sham. That was not how it was seen by the great Panhellonist, Isocrates, who at some time not long after 380 called on Agasilaos to lead a crusade against Persia. (Cartledge would have this appeal in the late 360s, when Agasilaos was over eighty and Sparta wholly absorbed in the struggle to regain Messenia, but the 370s provide a far more satisfactory context.) No great civil results from all this, for after the Peace of Antalcidas there was nothing that Agasilaos could do about Persia, but that he should take his place in the roll-call of Panhellenist folly seems central for the understanding of his influence with his friends.

Third, Thebes, for which Cartledge manifests a sympathy not shared by those Boeotians who coerced; witness their reluctance to assist the Hellenic cause in 323, the triumph of which would have meant the restoration of Thebes. Perhaps Cartledge is beguiled by the fact that the restored Boeotian Confederacy of the 370s was a sort of democracy, at which word he can scarce forbear to cheer, though there is no reason to think that that system was the fruit of ideological preference rather than the accident of the migration of 377; certainly in the 390s when those hostile to Sparta had their chance, they did not take it. The Greeks generally seem to have been more impressed by "Theban nequity" than by "Theban generosity" than "the egalitarian Boeotian Confederacy". Even in the later fifth century what Cartledge terms Thebes' "restless dynamism both political and military" was amply evident and presented a serious problem to Sparta. Cartledge, as many another, is persuaded that if only Agasilaos had treated Thebes more kindly and honourably all trouble would have been avoided.

This comforting presumption cannot be tested. Sparta came to disaster in 371. There is no proof that the same end would not have

been reached even earlier. The geography of Greece made it unlikely that any land empire could endure long. Thebes had manifested the will before ever Agasilaos had to face the problem, and, short of long, the growth of Theban power would have "made the Spartans afraid and forced them to war". Spartan policy in the 370s was inconsistent, both severe and lenient, a weakness indeed. Agasilaos was all for severity and it had been better perhaps if he had had his way entirely or not at all, but in view of the fact that Thebes was politically isolated by the eve of Leuctra his severe policy had not failed Sparta.

Finally, the class struggle between the Spartiates and the hektemtai, in terms of which Cartledge holds "the dominant and decisive contradiction or tension of Spartan society can fruitfully be analysed". This, of course, is somewhat different from the tensions which in his view weakened the Spartan army for its Armageddon, a matter which would require more space than can here be allowed. But his general view is that Sparta society was so rotten that the failure of the State was inevitable. He makes much, and rightly, of the conspiracy of Cinadon in 399. He has less to say of the remarkable fact that in 369, when Spartan territory for centuries inviolate was invaded by a huge Theban army, 6,000 Thebans volunteered to fight for the hated Spartiates. Spartan society did not collapse in the 360s nor indeed was there radical reform proposed until the 240s, a reform which aimed at enforcing not destroying the ancient order. The condition of the hektemtai continued to be wretched long after the crisis of 369. They did not even rise when Philip of Macedonia was at hand. The "crisis" was less critical than Cartledge would have it.

Like Greece itself, Sparta lost its power for military reasons. The genius of Epaminondas remains for me the sufficient explanation of her failure, but not for Cartledge, who reads Sparta's sins in her punishment. His view, vigorously expounded, is the conventional view, and no doubt will be vigorously applauded.

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Joseph Brodsky's collection of poems, *A Part of Speech*, was published in 1980, and his collection of essays, *Less than one*, in 1986.

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Katerina Clark is the author of *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 1982, and (with Michael Holquist) of *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 1985.

Neil Carver's *Seamus Heaney*, a Faber Student Guide, was published in the US last year. He is a lecturer in English at Sheffield University.

Todd Endelman is Professor of History at the University of Michigan, and editor of *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, which will be published shortly.

Inge-Silke Ewbank is a translator of Ibsen and Strindberg. Her *Machet* will be published as part of the Penguin Masters Study Series in 1989.

Peter Favre is a lecturer in French at the University of Leicester.

Tim Hilton's books include *Picasso*, 1976.

Christopher Hitchens is the Washington Columnist of the *Nation*.

Mick Jimah's pamphlet of poems, *The Zoologist's Bath and Other Adventures*, was published in 1982.

Ian Jack writes for the *Observer*. A collection of his journalism on Britain, *Reform the Oil Run Out*, was reviewed in the TLS of June 5.

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